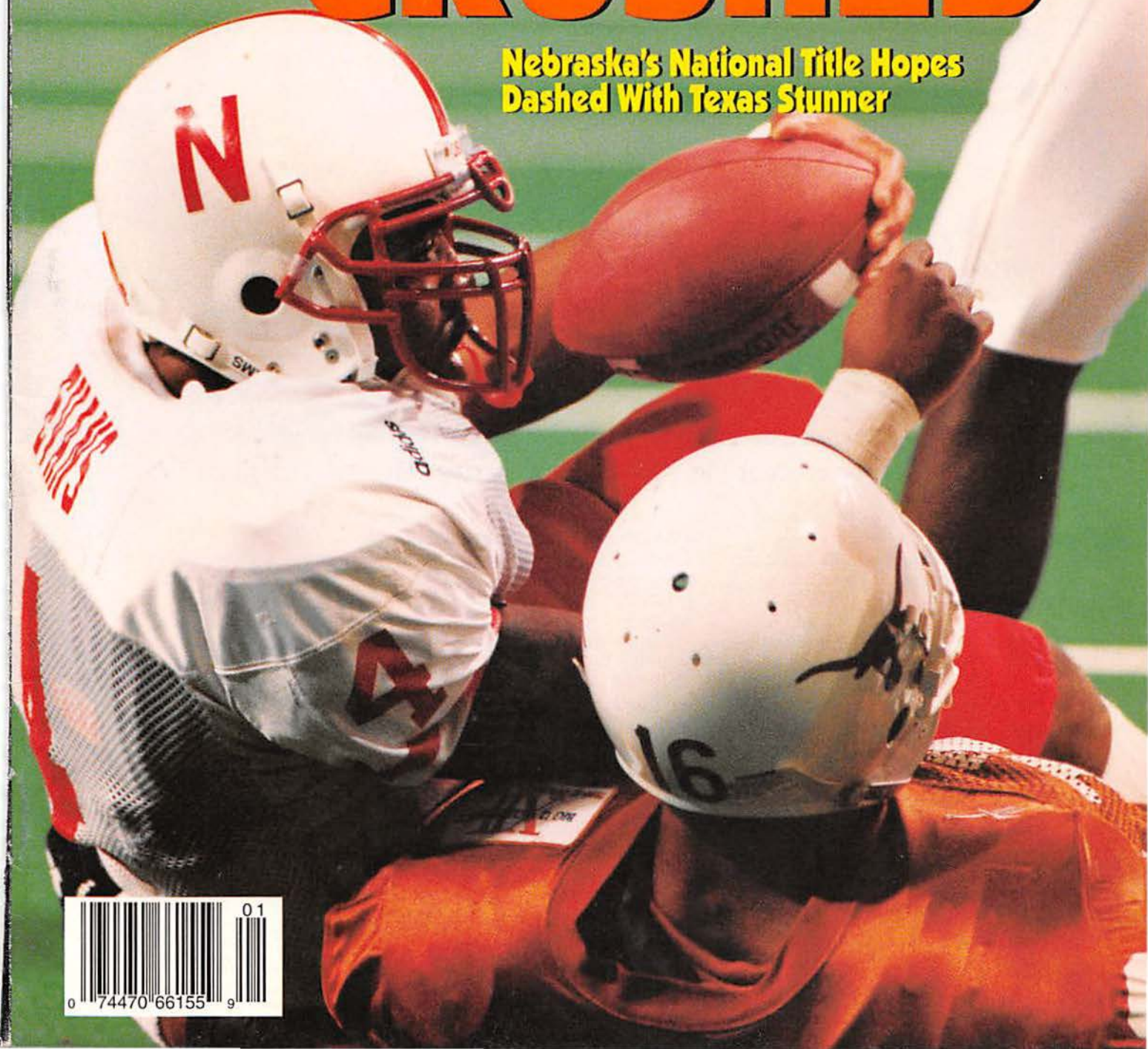


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Volume 17, No. 1
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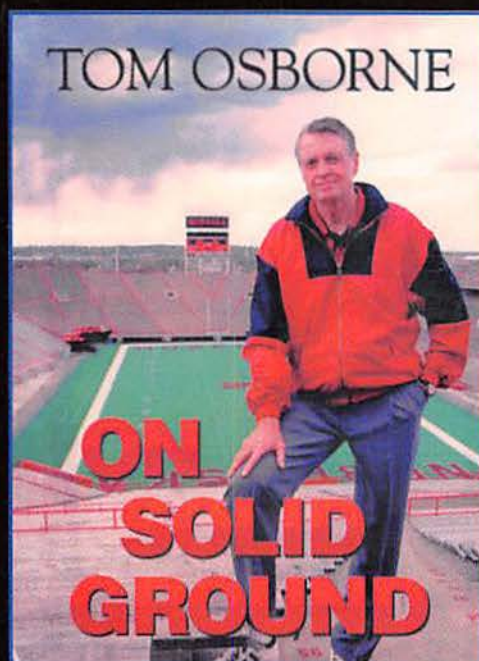
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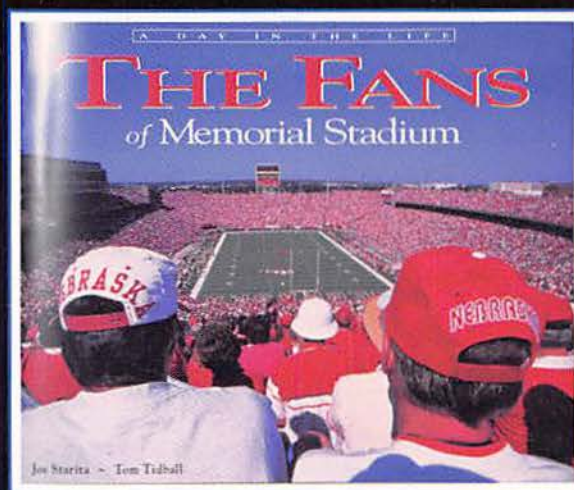


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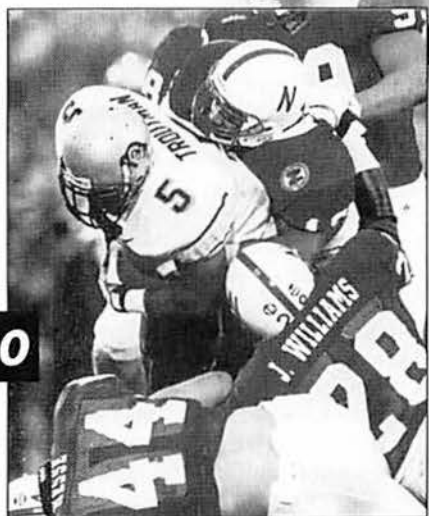
Opponents have looked for Black Shirt soft spots all season with no luck.

By Mike Babcock

30 Bettered By The Big 12

Playing in a tougher Big 12 conference prepared the Huskers for the NCAA Tournament. Something that may not have happened in the weaker Big Eight Conference.

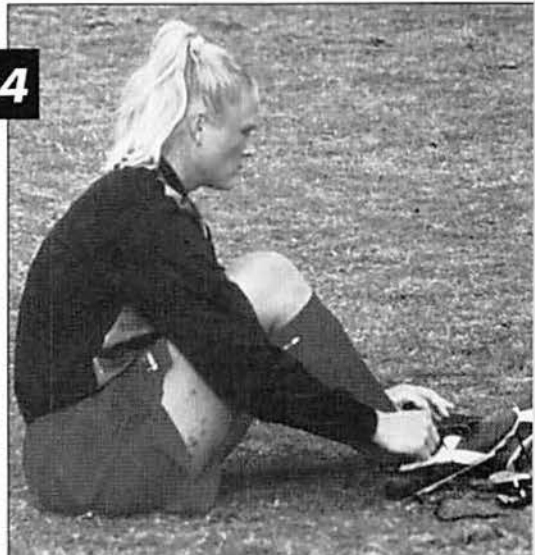
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NEXT ISSUE

Your next issue will be mailed January 10 and will recap the FedEx Orange Bowl game as well as preview the final weeks of the football recruiting period.



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LETTERS

I really liked Mike Babcock's "State of the Huskers" story about Bryce Miller ("All Guts, No Glory," Dec. 7) in the last issue of *Huskers Illustrated*. It's been said many times that Nebraska has the best walk-on program in the nation, producing such players as Brian Schuster and Jon Vedral.

Bryce Miller sounds like an upstanding young man, with priorities in order. What struck me about the article was that Miller might benefit from his experience playing for the Huskers more than some of the headliners who start for the Huskers. Miller was not a high school All-America, and he has not had everything handed to him. Miller appears to be a normal student who happens to play football. He clearly has come to the realization that for normal people (not those who can run a 4.3 40-yard dash or bench-press 500 pounds), nothing comes easy. He sounds like he understands the value of hard work. While he is not headed to the NFL and the riches that some Huskers will enjoy, he undoubtedly has benefited from his experience as a member of the Cornhuskers. And years from now, his claims of having played for back-to-back national champion teams at Nebraska will be no different from those claims made by Tommie Frazier, Jared Tomich, or anyone else who has played for Nebraska over the past few years.

Spencer DuBois
Omaha, Neb.

I was at the Big 12 Championship game in St. Louis, and it was a great game. Texas played very well, and deserved to win. Of course I was disappointed with the outcome, but the game made the trip worthwhile, and I will continue traveling to every Nebraska game I can get to.

What shocked me was that on my way out of the TransWorld Dome, I heard someone trying to pin the loss

on Scott Frost. That simply is not fair.

Perhaps he did not play the best game of his life, but Frost was far from the only culprit. We were without Ahman Green, and essentially without Damon Benning. DeAngelo Evans had a great game, even though I had read (in the *Huskers Illustrated* web site) that he was playing with a pulled groin. And it was reported that more than a dozen Huskers had missed practice time during the week because of the flu.



Maybe this upset fan thought that Nebraska would win simply because the sun came up in the morning, or because the Huskers were wearing their traditional red and white uniforms with the "N" on the helmets. But what he failed to realize was that Texas has some very talented players, and if their opponents don't play their best, the Longhorns are capable of beating a lot of teams.

His attack on Frost was not justified. Frost is young, and with this being his first season starting at quarterback for Nebraska, his inexperience showed at times. He has no where to go but up, and his performance next year will show that he made the right decision by transferring from Stanford, and that Tom Osborne made the right decision by starting him.

Bud Abraham
Sacramento, Calif.

I agree with Johnny Rodgers. His suggestion in "The Jet's Retrospective" that college players should be paid ("Needing Pay For Play," Dec. 7) was right. College athletes, especially college football players, make huge amounts of money for their universities, and they deserve to be compensated. Because of the rules and restrictions imposed by the NCAA, college athletes are not allowed to have an outside job, and that's where the argument that all college students deserve the same treatment gets shot down.

A theater major could complain that he spends just as much time rehearsing for a play as a football player spends in the weight room and on the practice field. But the difference is that the theater student is allowed to go out to a local community theater and take part in a production and get paid for it. An athlete

is not allowed to do the same thing.

Obviously, an athlete should be able to do the same things other students can do — go to a movie, go out for pizza, etc., and those things cost money. There is no question that athletes often are treated as stars, but in this case, they should be treated as regular students.

Howard Webber
Lincoln, Neb.

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Not So Sweet Sugar

NU's 1967 Sugar Bowl loss to Alabama helped pave the way for the Huskers' later success and redeeming 1971 national title win against the "Bear."

My first bowl game was Nebraska-Alabama. Jan. 2, 1967. The memories of that trip to New Orleans are still with me after all these years.

My sophomore year, we had a great season going until our last two games. We were ranked fourth in the country until we lost, 10-9, to Oklahoma. But the college football gods got together with the coaches at Nebraska and Alabama, namely Bob Devaney and Paul "Bear" Bryant, and put together a rematch of the previous year's Orange Bowl game, which Alabama won 39-28.

The loss to Alabama 12 months earlier was significant in that we were ranked third and Alabama was ranked fourth going into the game. When first-ranked Michigan State lost to UCLA in the Rose Bowl and second-ranked Arkansas lost to LSU in the Cotton Bowl, the door was left open for the Crimson Tide and the Huskers to play for the national championship New Year's night in New Orleans.

The situation was similar to what happened in 1971, when Nebraska won its first national championship. Only this time, we lost to Alabama and the Crimson Tide leap-frogged to the title. It left a nasty feeling in our system and so a rematch with Alabama seemed the best remedy.

The rematch was played in New Orleans, not Miami. The journey there was something.

Given the nature of the game (i.e. it was the year to kick some serious 'Bama butt), not only the Husker coaches and players but also the training staff, administrators, cheerleaders, training table food servers and "Gib," the equipment manager, focused attention on getting the job done against the Tide.

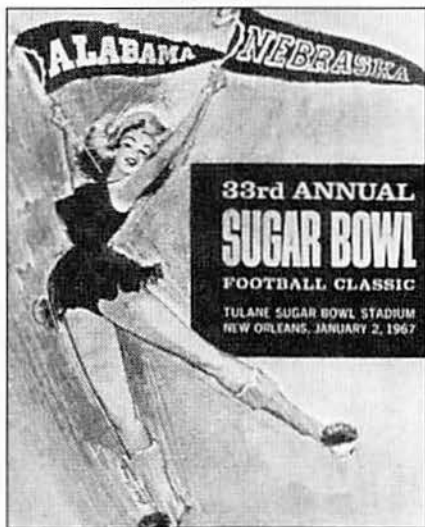
We had a rather "diligent" pre-bowl regimen for the game. In Lincoln, we had some mandatory "optional" workout sessions before

we left for . . . you guessed it . . . bowl camp. In order to avoid the cold, snowy weather in Lincoln in early December, we gathered coaches and players and headed south to Brownsville, Texas, for a week of practice in the warm sun.

It was shades of fall camp two-a-days. The nasty feeling mentioned early? Same deal. Different direction.

But two-a-days it was and as always, you just do what you have to do. Remember the warm, sunny sky and the swaying palms? Well, the sun was nowhere to be found. Brownsville recorded

Nebraska's rematch with Alabama in 1967 was a sobering experience.



some of the lowest temperatures on record during the first part of our stay. It was colder than a well-digger's back pocket during our stay.

Tired legs and a few wounds later, we broke camp and headed across the gulf for New Orleans. This was Nebraska's first trip to the Sugar Bowl, and we were all pretty pumped to get there.

At the Sugar Bowl banquet, I got a taste of the good, the bad and the ugly. The good was all the food the Sugar Bowl committee had served to us. The bad was my first experience

in tasting that ocean delicacy, oysters. And the ugly was . . . you guessed it . . . those same oysters.

Talk about good, bad and ugly, the banquet was our first encounter with Bryant. Each team was given bowl watches that night. Devaney called us, one-by-one to receive our watches. It was simple, clean and fast.

The ol' Bear, however, had to give a history on each of his players: where they were from. It took forever.

The game was played in the old Tulane Stadium, which I remember as being a certified relic even then. We had a sloppy week of practice because of all the rain.

Alabama was ranked No. 3. We were ranked No. 4. The Crimson Tide had a quarterback named Kenny "The Snake" Stabler and a wide receiver named Ray Perkins. They were great players.

Just before we went out for the game, Devaney came over to us and said: "Watch out for the deep pass on the very first play. Stabler likes to do that." On the first offensive play, "Snake" wound up and hit Perkins going down the sideline. Kaye Carstens, our cornerback and a speedster himself, ran Perkins down after about a 50-yard gain. Alabama then took it in and scored.

The Crimson Tide scored a lot that day, 34 points to be exact. We managed to score seven in the fourth quarter . . . 34-7, bitten by "The Snake" again, the second time that year.

Bear and his poor, little ol' boys chomped up on the big, slow boys from the north. Some fundamental and philosophical changes were being considered after that by the Nebraska coaching staff, namely paring down size and working on speed.

It didn't happen right away for the Huskers. But some of those changes ultimately paved the way for national success. It was fitting and sweet irony that Devaney's second national championship in 1971 came against the Bear. ■

Blaming Frost Is Unfair

Nebraska's loss to Texas in Big 12 title game was due to many factors, not just the play of one individual

It was bound to happen. A few misguided Nebraska football fans were going to blame Scott Frost for the Cornhuskers' 37-27 loss to Texas, no matter how irrational such complaints are.

Two or three faxes to that effect were sent to the *Huskies Illustrated* office.

Frost completed 15-of-24 passes for 155 yards, with no interceptions. He directed two touchdown drives of 80 yards and one of 72. His play wasn't spectacular, but it was solid enough to win.

Yet the stunning loss was somehow Frost's fault? Get real. Such complaints boggle the mind, and reveal a good deal more about those who make them than about the focus of their complaints.

If the stock market were to crash tomorrow, someone in Nebraska undoubtedly would expect Frost to shoulder the blame. As coach Tom Osborne says, quarterbacks get too much credit when things go right and too much blame when things go wrong. Frost often has taken criticism in either case.

Ron Brown, the Cornhusker receivers coach, came to Frost's defense recently.

"The guy's done quite well when you consider all the factors," he said.

The most significant on-the-field factor has been Frost's lack of experience in Nebraska's system. He spent two seasons at Stanford, playing in a radically different offensive system — when he was playing quarterback and not strong safety, the position at which he started as a sophomore there.

Maybe that's what those who blamed him for the Texas loss meant. They wanted him to play some defense and help in trying to stop his Longhorns' quarterback counterpart, James Brown.

"It was unfair to expect Scott to come in and waltz through this offense," Ron Brown said. "Here, he has to be able to run the option, drop back and throw, and throw the play-action pass."

Even though Frost spent two springs and one fall (on the scout team) at Nebraska before taking a snap in a game, his experience was, in truth, negligible. The correlation isn't one-to-one.

Frost's development was complicated by constant comparisons with the immediate past. He was held to unreasonable standards. "He had to

battled blood-clot problems and was the definitive quarterback for Osborne's complicated option offense.

And no Cornhusker has elicited more affection from them than Berringer.

In addition, Nebraska has had few players more popular than Frost's back-up, Matt Turman. When the Cornhusker seniors were introduced before the final home game, none drew louder applause than the determined Turman, who walked on from Neumann High School in Wahoo, Neb.

Turman has accepted his back-up's role with a grace that belies his

Jon Waller



**By
MIKE
BABCOCK**



Scott Frost has had trouble getting any breaks from some Nebraska "fans."

replace one of the greatest competitors ever in college football in Tommie Frazier," Brown said. "He also had to replace a legend in Brook Berringer."

No Cornhusker has earned more respect from fans than Frazier, who

competitiveness. It would be impossible not to like him, what with his omnipresent smile and engaging personality.

Turman came directly to Nebraska. Frost, who's from Wood River, Neb., accepted a scholarship from Stanford first, then transferred. "Scott made a difficult decision out of high school," Brown said. "He had every right to make that deci-

sion. But in many ways, I think, people (in Nebraska) felt let down.

"As a result, they probably held him to a higher standard."

Probably? Make that definitely.

When all of those factors are considered, plus the fact that the Cornhuskers were coming off back-to-back national championship seasons, Frost's task was close to impossible. Yet he hung tough.

He accounted for 22 touchdowns, nine by running and 13 by passing. He completed 104-of-200 passes (50.8 percent) for 1,440 yards, with only three interceptions. His passing yardage ranks ninth on Nebraska's single-season list — and already puts him 16th on the Cornhusker career list.

As mentioned before, no Cornhusker quarterback has ever started the first game in which he was eligible to play at Nebraska and been held to the standards that Frost has been expected to meet. Even the best have been allowed a period of adjustment. "In our microwave society, you just throw it in and heat it up right away," said Brown. "But there's a simmering process that needs to take place."

This season has seen Frost simmer. It has brought him to the right temperature so that next season he will be prepared to perform at a level likely to surpass the expectations of his harshest critics.

The Orange Bowl game against Virginia Tech will allow him to take one more step in that direction. By New Year's Day, he will have completed a long and difficult journey. There is no greater teacher than experience. From the Michigan State game until now, Frost has seen it all. He has been criticized and applauded. He was Nebraska's nominee as Big 12 Offensive Player of the Week four times.

And now, as he was after the 19-0 loss at Arizona State, he has been blamed for losing to Texas.

"Scott has learned well how to handle pressure," Brown said.

"It's been good for the coaches to see him not fall apart."

If you're already looking ahead to next season, to pass the time until the Orange Bowl game, rest assured the Cornhuskers will have an exceptional senior quarterback in Frost.

If something doesn't kill you, it will make you stronger. That applies in Frost's case. Those who have criticized him this season, will praise him next. Either that, or they'll say nothing at all. ■

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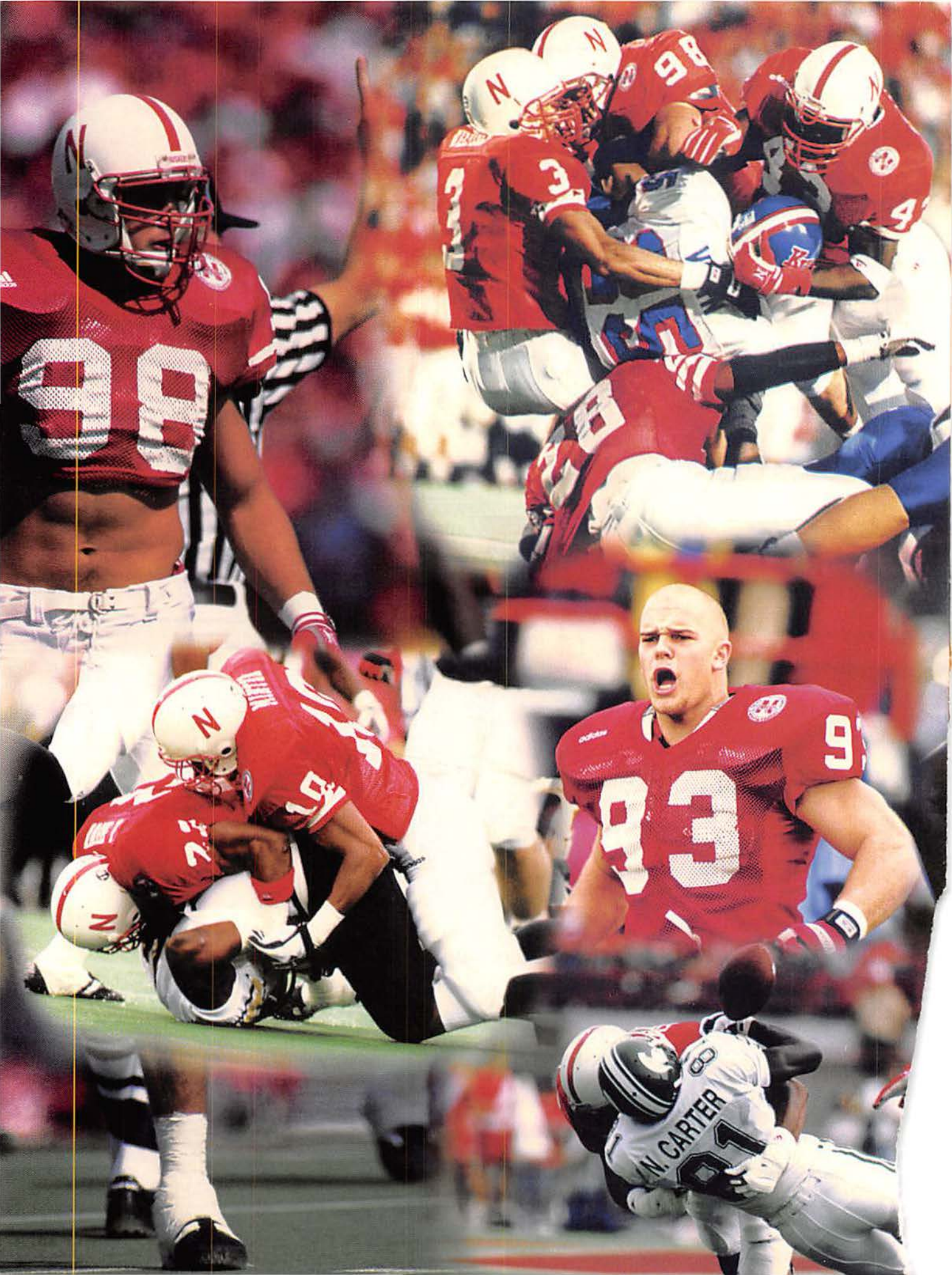
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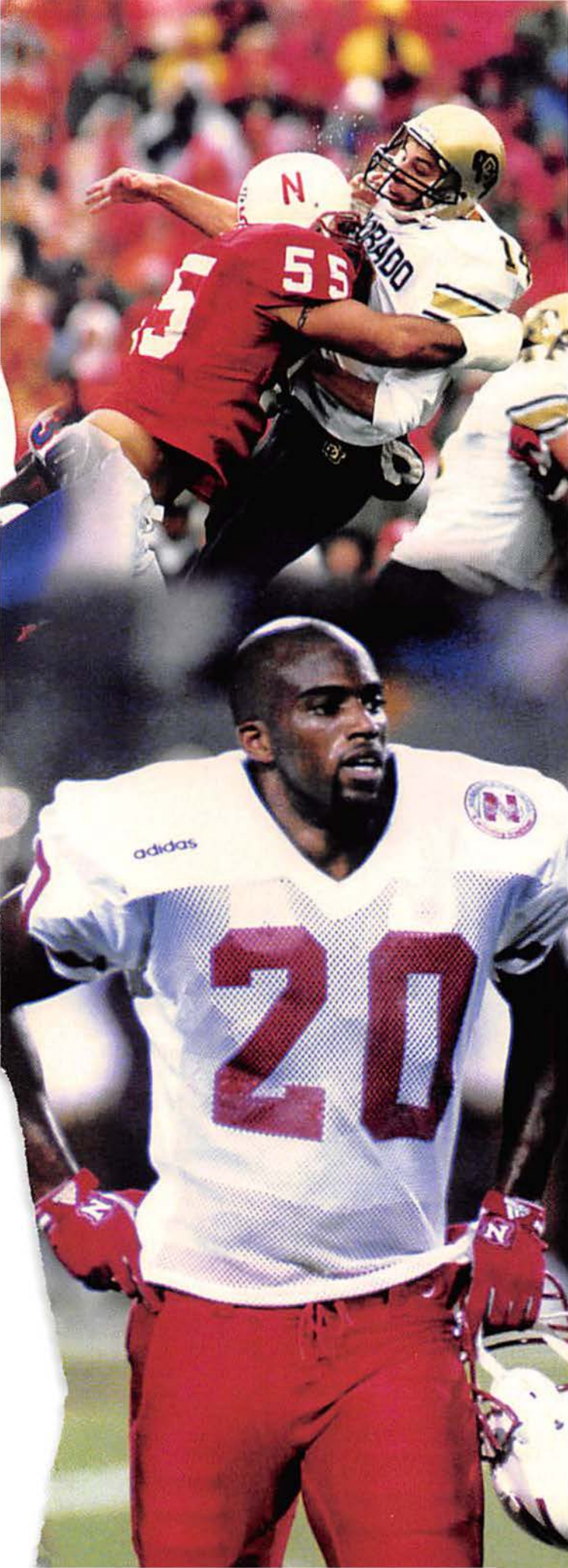
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NO WEAK LINKS

Opponents have looked for Black Shirt soft spots all season with no luck • by Mike Babcock

EVERYONE EXPECTED this Nebraska defense to be outstanding this season. Well, just about everyone. Tom Osborne had some doubts in the beginning, which should come as no surprise. Osborne didn't get to be the winningest active NCAA-Division I-A football coach by taking things for granted.

"I knew we had a lot of really great things going on our defense," Osborne said at an early-December news conference. "But we had enough soft spots, I thought we might not be very good."

Opponents have searched in vain for soft spots in Nebraska's defense this season. They've tried to run around it. They've tried to run through it. And they've tried to throw over it. They've tried just about everything, to no avail. The Black Shirts have been too strong, too smart and too swift.

The last of those qualities is probably the most significant. Nebraska's defenses have always been strong and smart. They've always been able to run, too. But not like this defense.

Nebraska's emphasis on defensive speed should be common knowledge by now. But occasionally someone still asks, as was the case before the Big 12 playoff game against Texas.

Osborne has addressed the subject countless times. His answer has been polished by the repetition that characterizes his practices. "You learn something from every game you play," he said. "I think you learn more when you get beat. We got beat down in Miami a few times by some awfully quick people."

At the risk of resurrecting unpleasant recollections, Nebraska lost seven consecutive bowl games before breaking the spell and winning the national championship in the 1995 Orange Bowl. Four of the seven losses came in the Orange Bowl, and six were against Florida State or Miami, which had defenses willing to sacrifice size for speed. They were fast and aggressive. They attacked.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, you could say Nebraska set about flattering those Seminoles and Hurricanes. But it wasn't as dramatic as it has been made to seem.

"I've often heard people ask: 'Well, when did you decide you wanted to recruit more speed?' I think in 1973 we tried to recruit fast people," said Osborne, who succeeded Bob Devaney as head coach that season.

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"Everybody we felt could run, we were after. We just didn't get a lot of them."

Junior rush end Grant Wistrom, the Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year, is a case in point, according to Osborne. "At one time, it would have been hard for us to recruit Grant Wistrom," he said.

The top programs in the country found their way to Webb City, Mo., to court Wistrom, who probably would have gone to Michigan had it not been for his father encouraging him to consider other schools first, just to be sure he was making the right choice. He was attracted to Nebraska, in part, by the Cornhuskers' switch to the attacking 4-3 base defense to which he has been so well-suited.

Jared Tomich, a two-time All-American at the other rush end, came to Nebraska as much by chance as by design. The Cornhuskers' interest in him as a walk-on was a result of film sent by Dick Peterson, a Nebraska letterman at defensive end who is now a high school strength coach in Indiana.

Peterson, a walk-on from Madison, Neb., saw Tomich play and thought Nebraska might be interested even though most schools weren't. Purdue told Tomich he wasn't good enough.

Tomich is the only defensive starter who walked on. The others are scholarship recruits, who drew varying degrees of attention from the nation's top programs.

Tackle Jason Peter, who is from Locust, N.J., followed brother Christian first to Milford Academy and then to Nebraska.

Jeff Ogard, the other tackle, was recruited from a small town, St. Paul, Neb. "Not too many people were interested in him," Osborne said. That probably had more to do with location than ability.

Middle linebacker Jon Hesse came from Lincoln (Southeast), Neb., and spent four years as a backup before getting an opportunity to start. Strongside linebacker Jamel Williams, like Tomich and senior cornerback Michael Booker, had to sit out an entire year because of NCAA freshman eligibility requirements before he could play. Many never get through such a year away.

Eric Stokes was good enough as a player and student that he could have enrolled at Nebraska at mid-

year and gotten a head start on his classes and football career. He decided to graduate with his class at East High School in Lincoln, however. He has been moved all over the secondary.

"As a sophomore, it was no big deal," Stokes said recently. "I just wanted to get out there. I wanted the coaches to put me anywhere. But my junior year, I was looking to establish myself."

Defensive coordinator Charlie McBride has said more than once that Stokes was the most valuable player on defense because of his ability to play every position in the secondary. "He's been invaluable," Osborne said. "He's very bright, very team-oriented. He comes to play every day."

The secondary was one of the soft



Doug DeVoe

Osborne had concerns about his secondary due to health and experience issues, not because of a lack of talent.

spots to which Osborne referred, not so much because of questions about the talent of those there but rather because of their health and experience.

"Early on, I didn't know if our corners were going to hold up," Osborne said.

Booker and Mike Fullman have been slowed by injuries, but "both of those guys have kind of worked out of it. I was afraid as the season went along, it would get worse." It did not, however.

Ralph Brown, considered the first true freshman position player since at least 1950 to begin a season as a starter, has "emerged as a great player" at the other corner, according to Osborne. "You can never count on a freshman doing that," he said. "At the start of the season, I wasn't real sure."

Last but certainly not least, Mike Minter has been a steady influence in the secondary. Minter's ability to move from rover, where he had been the starter for two seasons, to weakside linebacker before the Colorado game (after Terrell Farley was dismissed from the team) was critical.

With the change to a 4-3 base defense, "a lot of the things we do, we're matching up our linebackers on receivers and sometimes on backs. We really began to play with six defensive backs instead of four," said Osborne. "The outside backers are people who could play in most secondaries."

"We've gone from more of a zone concept to a lot of man-to-man (coverage). And when you play a lot of man-to-man, you don't want your linebackers, unless they can run, locking up with somebody."

That's why senior Ryan Terwilliger, who backed up Farley, has remained a situational player, typically used in apparent running situations. "Ryan is not a guy that probably you want to get matched up on somebody who's 4.3 (in the 40-yard dash) all over the field," said Osborne.

The loss of Farley was significant. It "really hurt us because it did some damage to the whole structure of our defense. But I think Minter has stepped up to the plate, like a lot of our players have."

Minter was replaced at rover by Stokes, and Stokes, in turn, was replaced at free safety by Eric Warfield, who had been his backup. "We're just fortunate we had some great athletes and a little bit of depth at that position," Osborne said.

The Black Shirts have compensated for the loss of Farley without missing a beat. They've been resilient, in addition to everything else.

The lone black eye against the Huskers came in the Big 12 Championship game when they gave up 503 total offensive yards and a school record 8.8 yards per play average to Texas.

But don't look for his unit to hang its head. The Black Shirts have battled through adversity before and will do it again.

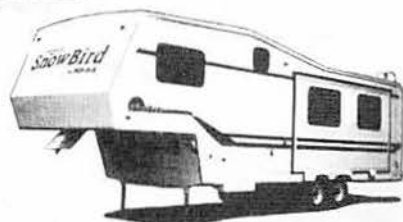
"I don't know that there's any secret to it," Osborne said of Nebraska's defensive success this season. "I wish I could tell you we were real smart, that all of a sudden we just sat down and the light went on. But it wasn't that way." ■

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10-1 VIRGINIA TECH 10-2

December 31, 1996 • 6:00 p.m. (CST) • CBC
Pro Player Park • Miami, Fla.

FEDEX ORANGE BOWL PREVIEW

By Mark Derowitsch

Q

quick. Name the team that won the Big East Conference last season and represented the league in the Sugar Bowl.

Did you say Miami? Wrong answer. Syracuse? Try again.

West Virginia? Getting closer.

The correct answer is Virginia Tech. And guess what? The Hokies are not your average one-year wonders.

Virginia Tech followed up its improbable Big East championship with a 10-1 record and another league crown. Its reward for a second spectacular season is getting a chance to play two-time defending national champion Nebraska in the Orange Bowl on Dec. 31 at Miami's Pro Player Park (formerly Joe Robbie Stadium).

For Nebraska, which saw its national championship aspirations go down the drain after a 37-27 loss to Texas in the Big 12 title game, playing in the Orange Bowl against the 10th-ranked Hokies was something of a surprise. Had Nebraska beaten Texas, it would have been playing for a possible national crown against top-ranked Florida State in the Sugar Bowl on Jan. 2.

But for the Hokies, playing

Nebraska provides an opportunity to measure the program against one of the top teams in the nation.



"We have similar records over the last few years, but nobody has ever put us in the same category as Nebraska," Virginia Tech coach

Frank Beamer said. "Nobody is really in that category with them."

The Hokies are 10-1, losing only to Syracuse, 52-21, on Sept. 28. Since then, Virginia Tech has reeled off seven consecutive victories, including wins against Miami (21-7), West Virginia (31-14) and Virginia (26-9) to end the season. In those final three games, the Hokies held their opponents to just 30 points.

Nebraska coach Tom Osborne said he doesn't know much about the Hokies.

"But we have a similar philosophy about defense," Osborne said.

What Osborne likely means is that the Hokies play the same aggressive, attacking in-your-face style the Huskers play. A quick look at the numbers proves it.

Hokie opponents averaged 316 total yards and 15.3 points per game this season. Virginia Tech recorded 46 sacks, picked off 12 passes and held foes to just 112 yards rushing a



Frank Beamer's team finished 10-1 after winning seven straight games at the end of the year.

PRESS PICKS

• Mike Babcock, Huskers Illustrated

Even though hopes of a third consecutive national championship now are gone, Nebraska will be on a mission in the Orange Bowl — that will be especially true of the defense, which will be looking to salvage the respect it spent 11 games earning only to see it vanish in the Big 12 playoff.

Virginia Tech also has a lot to gain in the way of respect. But the Hokies might have found a better way to spend New Year's Eve.

Nebraska 31, Virginia Tech 17.

• Brian Rosenthal, sports editor, York (Neb.) News Times

This is still the season dedicated to the memory of Brook Berringer. And even though the Huskers can't win the national championship, they're in a major bowl game, with a chance to extend a postseason winning streak to three: Orange, Fiesta and Orange again.

Nebraska 27, Virginia Tech 17.

• Todd Henrichs, sports editor, Grand Island (Neb.) Independent

If the Hokies are more excited about playing in the Orange Bowl, the score might easily be reversed. Healthy Huskers, however, should prove too much.

Nebraska 28, Virginia Tech 20.

• Scott Franzke, Prime Sports

The Cornhuskers would rather be playing Florida State in the Sugar Bowl, and the hangover from the Big 12 Championship game still lingers.

Nebraska 31, Virginia Tech 21.

game.

Defensive end Cornell Brown is the Hokies' leader on defense. Brown, a first-team all-Big East selection, made a team-high eight sacks, broke up three passes, recovered two fumbles and was in on 58 total tackles. Brown — a 6-foot-2, 240 pound senior — did this while playing in only eight of the team's 11 games.

"Cornell is an extremely gifted football player," Beamer said. "He has exceptional quickness for a man of his size."

But he's not the only Hokie to get to the passer. Defensive tackle Kerwin Hairston and end John Engelberger recorded six sacks apiece while linebacker Brandon Semones added five. Waverly Jackson, who starts at the other tackle spot, got to the quarterback three times.

Semones led the team with 88 tackles, including eight for loss, in the Hokies' 4-3 alignment. Linebacker Myron Newsome was next with 84 spots while 'backers Steve Tate and Tony Morrison combined for 110 tackles.

The Hokies' secondary is equally impressive. Cornerback Antonio Banks leads the team with four interceptions and 49 tackles, while Loren Johnson, who starts at left cornerback, picked off three passes. Free safety Torrian Gray plays well against the run or pass. He made 76 tackles, third most on the team, and also intercepted two passes. Pierson Prioleau starts at rover, and the sophomore made 41 solo stops and two sacks and broke up 10 passes.



Virginia Tech

Virginia Tech's most recognizable athlete doesn't play defense, though. Quarterback Jim Druckenmiller leads the Hokies' potent offensive attack that averaged 417 yards of total offense and 227 passing yards per contest this fall.

Druckenmiller, who was named the Big East's co-Player of the Year, completed 142-of-250 passes (56.8 percent) for 2,071 yards and 17 touchdowns. Most impressive was that Druckenmiller threw just five interceptions all season. He also rushed for 205 yards.

But Druckenmiller isn't a one-man show. Tailback Ken Oxendine lead the team with 890 yards and 13 touchdowns even though he missed two games. Shyrone Stith added 474 yards on the ground, while fullback Shelly Ellison gained just 28 yards in 11 games.

Flanker Shawn Scales and split end Cornelius White are Druckenmiller's favorite targets. Scales, a junior, and White, a senior, caught 30 passes apiece. Scales had

Defensive end Cornell Brown is the Hokies' top pass rush threat.

510 receiving yards and four touchdowns while White added 449 yards and also scored four times.

Backup split end Michael Stuewe had 25 catches, five of which went for scores, and tight end Bryan Jennings caught 12 passes for 159 yards and two touchdowns.

Up front, the Hokies are led by center Billy Conaty, a first-team all-conference selection this year. The 6-3, 298 pound senior is considered one of the top centers in the country. Conaty is surrounded by tackles T.J. Washington and Jay Hagood and guards Gennaro DiNapoli and Todd Washington.

Kicker Shayne Graham hit 10-of-16 field goal attempts this season. Punter Jim Kibble averaged 37.3.

Nebraska and Virginia Tech have never met on the football field prior to the Orange Bowl. Last season, the Hokies downed Texas 28-10 in the Sugar Bowl. ■

NEBRASKA VS. VIRGINIA TECH TWO-DEEPS

HUSKER OFFENSE

SE	5	Brendan Holbein	5-9	190	Sr
	89	Jeff Lake	6-4	210	Jr
LT	77	Adam Treu	6-6	305	Sr
	75	Chris Dishman	6-3	310	Sr
LG	75	Chris Dishman	6-3	310	Sr
	67	Aaron Taylor	6-1	305	Jr
C	67	Aaron Taylor	6-1	305	Jr
	59	Josh Heskew	6-3	280	So
RG	64	Jon Zatechka	6-2	290	Jr
	62	Matt Hoskinson	6-1	280	Jr
RT	70	Eric Anderson	6-4	305	Jr
	77	Adam Treu	6-6	305	Sr
TE	90	Tim Carpenter	6-3	255	Jr
or	34	Vershan Jackson	6-0	245	Jr
QB	7	Scott Frost	6-3	215	Jr
	11	Matt Turman	5-11	185	Sr
FB	28	Brian Schuster	5-11	230	Sr
	45	Joel Makovicka	5-11	235	So
IB	4	DeAngelo Evans	5-9	210	Fr
	*30	Ahman Green	6-0	210	So
WB	25	Jon Vedral	5-11	205	Sr
	29	Shevin Wiggins	5-11	190	So
PK	35	Kris Brown	5-10	200	So

HOKIE DEFENSE

DE	58	Cornell Brown	6-2	246	Sr
	94	Jason Berish	6-3	224	So
DT	98	Waverly Jackson	6-3	298	Sr
	92	Nat Williams	6-2	271	Fr
DT	93	Kerwin Hairston	6-2	272	Jr
	77	Carl Bradley	6-2	261	Fr
DE	87	John Engelberger	6-4	245	Fr
	90	Danny Wheel	6-2	253	Jr
OLB	21	Brandon Semones	6-0	202	Sr
	2	Tyron Edmond	6-1	199	So
ILB	49	Steve Tate	6-1	240	Jr
	8	Tony Morrison	6-1	231	Jr
ILB	55	Myron Newsome	5-9	218	Sr
	46	Jamel Smith	6-1	227	Fr
LC	12	Loren Johnson	5-10	176	So
	30	Anthony Midget	5-11	174	Fr
FS	14	Torrian Gray	6-0	204	Sr
	1	Keion Carpenter	6-0	199	So
ROV	20	Pierson Prioleau	5-10	174	So
	23	Jomo Nelson	5-10	181	So
RC	9	Antonio Banks	5-10	195	Sr
	30	Anthony Midget	5-11	174	Fr
P	95	Jimmy Kibble	5-10	178	Fr

HOKIE OFFENSE

SE	4	Cornelius White	6-0	202	Sr
	31	Michael Stuewe	6-1	188	Jr
LT	71	Jay Hagood	6-4	313	Sr
	74	Derek Smith	6-6	288	So
LG	75	Todd Washington	6-3	308	Jr
	97	Dwight Vick	6-4	307	So
C	61	Billy Conaty	6-3	298	Sr
	72	Tim Wade	6-3	295	Sr
RG	64	Gennaro DiNapoli	6-3	290	Jr
	66	Todd Wheatley	6-4	300	So
RT	76	T.J. Washington	6-4	313	Sr
	74	Derek Smith	6-6	288	So
TE	81	Bryan Jennings	6-4	254	Sr
	88	Sean Sullivan	6-3	260	Jr
QB	16	Jim Druckenmiller	6-4	224	Sr
	5	Al Clark	6-1	198	So
FB	32	Brian Edmonds	5-10	250	Sr
	44	Shelly Ellison	6-1	247	Fr
TB	28	Ken Oxendine	6-1	225	Jr
	34	Marcus Parker	5-10	221	Jr
FL	22	Shawn Scales	5-11	180	Jr
	13	James Crawford	6-2	205	So
PK	17	Shayne Graham	5-11	185	Fr

HUSKER DEFENSE

LR	93	Jared Tomich	6-2	260	Sr
	57	Chad Kelsay	6-3	235	So
DT	97	Jeff Ogard	6-6	310	Sr
	99	Jason Wiltz	6-3	285	So
DT	55	Jason Peter	6-5	285	Jr
	74	Scott Saltsman	6-2	270	Sr
RR	98	Grant Wistrom	6-5	250	Jr
	84	Mike Rucker	6-6	250	So
SAM	28	Jamel Williams	6-2	210	Sr
	46	Brian Shaw	6-0	215	Fr
MLB	44	Jon Hesse	6-4	250	Sr
	56	Jay Foreman	6-1	230	So
WLB	91	Ryan Terwilliger	6-5	225	Sr
	1	Eric Johnson	6-0	205	So
LC	20	Michael Booker	6-2	205	Sr
	12	Mike Fullman	5-10	190	Sr
FS	16	Eric Stokes	5-11	195	Sr
	3	Eric Warfield	6-0	195	Jr
ROV	10	Mike Minter	5-10	190	Sr
	4	Octavious McFarlin	5-11	195	Jr
RC	22	Ralph Brown	5-11	180	Fr
	26	Jerome Peterson	5-7	185	Fr
P	19	Jesse Kosch	6-0	185	Jr

Depth charts were compiled Dec. 16, 1996 and may change before game time. # = duplicate number * = injured, but probable for game

Sometimes You've Just Got To Believe

Everything went Nebraska's way in 1971 as losses by Texas and Ohio State gave Devaney's team the opening it needed

One of the longest days in my life has to have been Jan. 1, 1971. I remember it as if it were yesterday. I felt like I had ants in my pants and I was ready to dance. We were rated No. 3 in the polls, behind Texas and Ohio State — both undefeated.

The chances of both teams losing and leaving us No. 1 seemed slim. At the same time, however, we concentrated on the task. My grandmother once told me, if you hold a thought long enough, it could come true. It was worth a try. So I held on to the thought that we could get to be No. 1.

I remember watching the early bowl games on New Year's Day of 1971 at the old Ivanhoe Hotel, where our team had been staying since Christmas Day, waiting to play LSU in the Orange Bowl. It was funny at the time because I had never in my life rooted for Notre Dame. But that day, I was so excited, I could have made their cheerleading team. It was the Cotton Bowl in Dallas, where No. 1-ranked Texas was playing the Fighting Irish. The Irish had only one loss, and that was to Southern Cal.

I was sitting in my room by myself so no one could see how silly I was. But before the Texas-Notre Dame game started, Rich Glover, Willie Harper, Billy Olds and a host of other players had gathered in my room and were sillier than me. By halftime of the game, we were all drunk with excitement.

Notre Dame was ahead 14-3, and I felt like I had been playing in the game. By the end, after Texas had lost, I was so tired, I had to put

everybody out of my room so I could take a nap and get ready for the next game. Now it was going to be the Rose Bowl, and since I had done such a good job of cheering for Notre Dame, I thought Stanford was going to need me in their cheering section, too.

All that had to happen was for Stanford to upset Ohio State and we would have a good chance of being the first team ever to bring back a national championship to Nebraska.

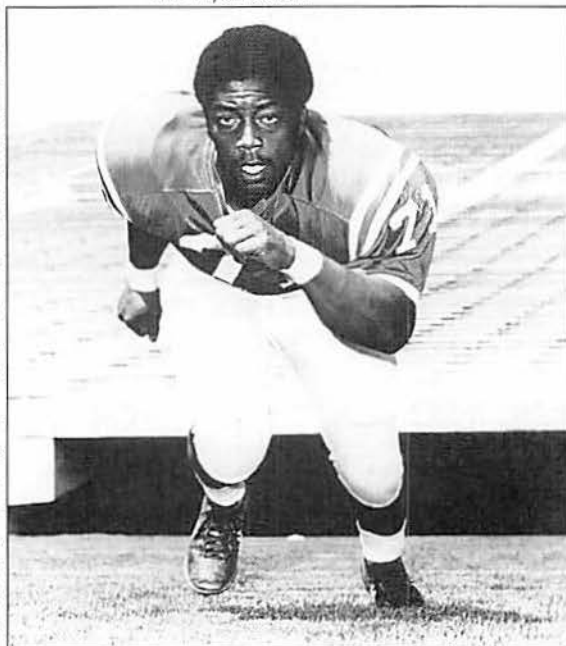
I was really pumped when I took my nap, dreaming about the possibilities and what Grandma had said about holding a thought long enough and then being able to have it. I wasn't going to let the thought

Rich Glover and other players joined Rodgers in cheering for Notre Dame in 1971.

University of Nebraska



By
**JOHNNY
RODGERS**



of winning a national championship go, even in my sleep.

When I woke up, it was time to get ready to go to the Orange Bowl stadium. I went down to get taped, and everybody was pumped. We all

could feel it. Coach Bob Devaney had told us we still had a chance to win the national championship, and he hadn't been wrong yet.

We started watching the Rose Bowl, but before we could really get into the game, it was time to catch the bus for the stadium. It was in the air. You could feel it. I felt sort of like Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*, chanting to myself: "I do believe in miracles. I do believe in miracles." We listened on the bus and waited for score up-dates from the Ohio State-Stanford game in the locker room.

The first score I heard was that Ohio State led 17-13 going into the fourth quarter.

When we took the field to warm up, the Orange Bowl stadium was covered with Big Red fans, chanting: "We're No. 1." They were stomping on the wooden seats at the stadium and predicting the outcome of the day's events. Fans with radios kept yelling the plays and the score of the Rose Bowl.

Word came down that Stanford had gone ahead 20-17, and I thanked my grandmother. I prayed to God for more energy because I had already been head cheerleader for Notre Dame and Stanford in two games and now I had to play in a game. Stanford finally won 27-17, and we had our destiny in our own hands. We were already on the field, loose and ready to bring home Nebraska's first national championship.

Coach Devaney was so excited, he was as red as a Santa Claus suit. We started chanting "We're No. 1" right along with the fans. Coach Devaney kept telling us we still had to beat LSU. We looked at him like he was crazy and kept on chanting "We're No. 1" because we knew we were. LSU was in trouble.

We won the game 17-12, but I wasn't very much help. I was so tired from my cheerleading debut that I didn't even score in the biggest game of my life to that point. I was just happy to win.

Since then, I've always respected cheerleaders and what they do. ■



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Texas Stuns Huskers, 37-27, To Win First Big 12 Title

A white carriage, pulled by a white horse rolled down Broadway in the gathering dusk, toward the Old Courthouse and the Old Cathedral. Its driver was dressed as Santa Claus.

The Gateway Arch rose in steel majesty above the St. Louis skyline, just a few blocks to the south. Christmas lights illuminated the city streets near the Trans World Dome.

The streets didn't seem particularly busy for a Saturday in early December.

There was little evidence of the day's events inside the domed stadium. Three obviously inebriated young men left the Dome and began an obnoxious journey to the southwest, stopping occasionally to annoy couples strolling along the sidewalk in the opposite direction.

By **MIKE BABCOCK**

A small group of football fans, college age, stood outside the Dome and celebrated. A female broke from the group, did a cartwheel, then proclaimed: "I landed on my feet."

No one was impressed by her acrobatic accomplishment.

For the most part, activity in the vicinity of the Dome seemed normal enough.

GAME RECAP

Inside, however, newspaper reporters were still trying to make sense out of what had occurred a few hours before. It was if reason had been checked at the door, so that once inside the Dome, anything was possible . . . anything, including not just the unexpected but the unthinkable,

maybe even the impossible: a Texas victory against Nebraska in the first-ever Big 12 football championship game.

It had happened, though. It was as real as the nearby Mississippi River, flowing south to New Orleans, which was to be the Cornhuskers' destination after they made short work of unranked Texas.

The Longhorns had endured four losses and had barely earned the right to represent the conference's South Division in the title game. But for a 51-15 victory against archrival Texas A&M the previous Friday, Texas would have had to watch the Big 12 playoff on television at home in Austin.

St. Louis was to be Nebraska's point of departure for a Jan. 2, 1997, date with top-ranked Florida State in the Sugar Bowl game. The Cornhuskers were headed to the Big Easy, easily. Their destiny was going to be getting a second chance at winning a third consecutive national championship.

Ohio State was going to beat Arizona State in the Rose Bowl, leaving the door to the title open for Nebraska, which was going to walk through by defeating Florida State. It would be payback time for four bowl losses to the Seminoles, including the 18-16 heartbreaker in Miami on Jan. 1, 1994.

You could sense it. You could book a flight and make hotel accommodations.

Brown backed up his pregame bravado by eluding a Black Shirt defense that failed to record a sack for the first time in 40 games.



Doug DeVoe/Cover by Doug DeVoe



You could, that is, until the Cornhuskers entered the Dome.

No matter how many times Nebraska fans rubbed their eyes and stared up at the scoreboard in the Dome, the image remained: Texas 37, Nebraska 27. It was as painful as it was vivid.

It was an aberration. It must have been. There was no reasonable explanation for what happened to the Cornhuskers, particularly to a defense praised as possibly the best in school history.

The defense still should be judged by the season, not one game. But that didn't help.

"We just didn't hold up our end," Nebraska defensive coordinator Charlie McBride said. "We just fell apart defensively. We probably made as many mistakes in one game as we did all season."

The numbers supported that. Texas gained 503 yards, the 11th-highest total ever against Nebraska, and the most since 1993, when Kansas State gained 565 yards in a 45-28 loss at Lincoln.

James Brown, the Longhorns' quarterback, passed for 353 of those yards, the eighth-highest total ever against Nebraska. He completed 19-

Nebraska didn't think Texas, let alone Priest Holmes, a backup tailback, would be able to run the ball with a lot of success.

of-28, with one touchdown and two interceptions.

Prior to the game, Brown predicted a Texas victory, even though Nebraska was heavily favored. A wire service story quoted Brown as saying: "I think we're going to win by three touchdowns. I watched the Colorado game and they sacked (Koy) Detmer every other time he dropped back to pass.

"To sack me, they're going to have to catch me."

Afterward, Brown claimed he hadn't said those things exactly. But perception can be more important than precision. "He backed up what he said," Nebraska rush end Grant Wistrom said.

"A couple of times, I thought we had him sacked for sure. He's a darn good quarterback."

The Cornhuskers never caught Brown, at least not to sack him. For the first time in 40 games, Nebraska failed to get to the quarterback at least once for a sack. "Detmer (sacked three times), you knew where he was going to be," said McBride. "Brown, he was all over the place. He could improvise. He made the big plays when it counted, both running and passing. His athletic ability was outstanding."

That was obvious countless times. Any one of a number of plays illustrated Brown's elusiveness, includ-

ing the third play of Texas' second possession. The Longhorns lined up second-and-4 from the Nebraska 34-yard line. Brown took the snap and dropped back 11 yards, with strong-side linebacker Jamel Williams in pursuit. The fleet Williams dived at Brown's ankles, to no avail.

Near the 45-yard line, after eluding Williams, Brown cut back toward the line of scrimmage, ducked under the arms of rush end Jared Tomich and ran along the Nebraska sideline, turning what would have been a significant loss into a 3-yard gain. Rover Eric Warfield finally tackled him.

"Brown was hard to catch," Tom Osborne said.

The junior from Beaumont, Texas, didn't waste any time, directing an 11-play, 80-yard touchdown drive on the game's opening series. He declared his intentions on the first play, completing a pass to tight end Derrick Scott for a 10-yard gain. He would throw three more passes during the drive, all complete, then hand the ball to Priest Holmes, who ran up the middle for 5 yards and a touchdown.

Holmes, a second-team running back, rushed for 120 yards and three touchdowns. Though a back-up, "he was the one I was worried about watching film," said Nebraska's Mike Minter.



Jon Waller

Holmes accounted for all but 30 of Texas' net rushing yards. The ability to run the ball was a key to the Longhorns' success, according to Osborne. "One thing we thought would happen is, they'd get some yards throwing the ball," he said. "We didn't think they'd be able to run as well as they did."

No one could have anticipated the big plays with which Nebraska's defense was hit, either. "I can't remember, in all my years I've been at Nebraska, so many big plays," said McBride. Such a play, executed by Brown, settled the issue, and was the focus of considerable post-game discussion.

Texas faced fourth-and-1 at its 28-yard line, clinging to a 30-27 lead that it would have to hold for two minutes. The Cornhuskers expected Texas to "freeze" them at the line of scrimmage, in hopes of drawing them offside for the first down. Failing, it would punt the ball away and rely on its defense.

Instead, Brown took the snap, faked a hand-off and ran to his left, stopped and flipped a pass to tight end Derek Lewis, who was wide-open. The gain was 61 yards before Williams caught Lewis.

On the next play, Holmes scored his third touchdown, on an 11-yard run.

"It was a great call. I admire whoever did it," McBride said of the daring pass.

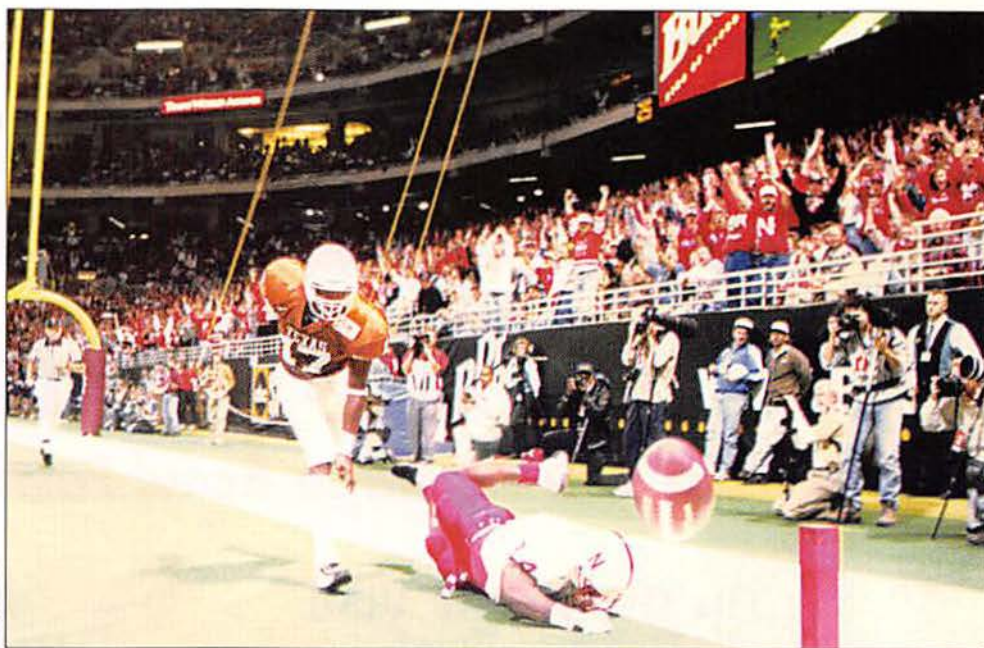
Texas coach John Mackovic made the call. "If it hadn't worked, it would have been a really dumb call," Wistrom said, with maybe a hint of sarcasm. "Now, Coach Mackovic is a genius."

Failure to complete the pass would have given Nebraska the ball at the Texas 28-yard line, with an opportunity to at least tie and send the game into overtime. The way the Cornhusker offense had asserted itself during the third quarter, driving 72 yards on 15 plays for a touchdown to take a 24-23 lead, if Mackovic's gamble had failed, Nebraska might even have won the game in regulation.

"It was a gamble on their

It was a dark day for a Husker defense that made more mistakes against Texas than it did all season.

Jon Waller



Doug DeVoe



Doug DeVoe

Except for DeAngelo Evans (who scored three times), the end zone was out of reach for Nebraska's offense.

yards and three touchdowns.

"DeAngelo played well, as I expected he would," Osborne said.

He did so despite a nagging groin injury that left him less than full-speed.

Kris Brown added field goals of 51 and 24 yards to Evans' touchdowns. But the points weren't enough. Texas averaged 8.8 yards per snap, to break a record against Nebraska that had held for nearly half a century. In 1950, Oklahoma averaged 8.56 yards per snap in a 49-35 victory at Norman.

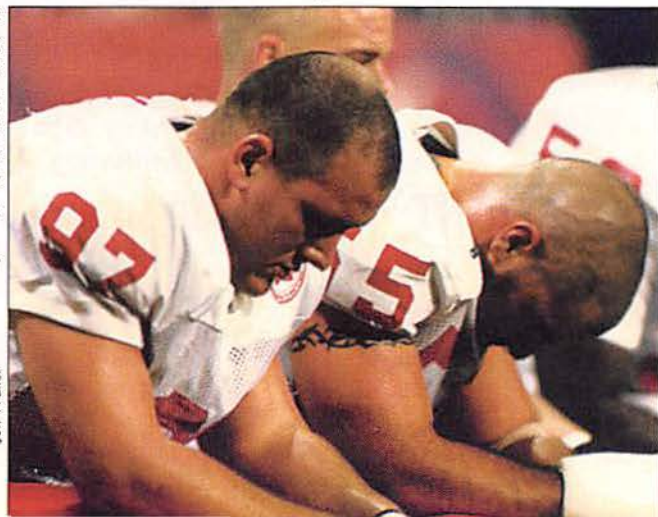
In the 19-0 loss at Arizona State, "we played pretty well (defensively)," said McBride. Not so this time. "It took two to tango: their offense and our defense. They just took us to the cleaners."

As was the case against Arizona State, the game had an element of the surreal. Nebraska ran 87 plays to 57 by Texas, and the Cornhuskers dominated time of possession 39:35 to 20:25.

Prior to the game, if you had told someone Nebraska would get 30 more snaps than the Longhorns, have the ball for nearly 20 minutes more and score 27 points, well...

Outside the Dome, the world seemed normal, pleasantly serene.

Inside, however, for three hours and 15 minutes, nothing was as it seemed. ■



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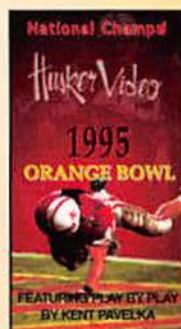
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STATISTICS VS. TEXAS

DECEMBER 7, 1996

Trans World Dome • St. Louis, Mo.
Attendance: 68,109



SCORE BY QUARTERS

TEAM	1	2	3	4	Final
NEBRASKA	7	10	7	3	— 27
TEXAS	7	13	3	14	— 37

TEAM STATS

	NU	UT
First Downs	26	22
Rushing	15	6
Passing	11	14
Penalty	0	2
Rushing Attempts	63	28
Yards Gained Rushing	269	165
Yards Lost Rushing	26	15
Net yards rushing	243	150
Net yards passing	155	353
Passes attempted	24	29
Passes completed	15	19
Had intercepted	0	2
Total plays	87	57
Total net yards	398	503
Avg. gain per play	4.6	8.8
Fumbles-lost	3-2	0-0
Penalties-yards	5-35	4-24
Punts-yards	3-117	1-43
Avg. per punt	39.0	43.0
Possession time	39:35	20:25

DEFENSIVE LEADERS

NEBRASKA	Solo	Asst	TT	Sacks	Int.
Player					
Stokes	7	1	8	0	1
Minter	5	2	7	0	0
Williams	5	2	7	0	0
Warfield	4	1	5	0	1
Brown	4	0	4	0	0
Wistrom	3	0	3	0	0
Hesse	2	0	2	0	0
Rucker	1	1	2	0	0
Shaw	1	1	2	0	0
Wiggins	1	0	1	0	0
Ogord	1	0	1	0	0
Tomich	1	0	1	0	0
Kelsay	1	0	1	0	0
Peter	1	0	1	0	0
Peterson	1	0	1	0	0
Fullman	1	0	1	0	0

TEXAS	Solo	Asst	TT	Sacks	Int.
Player					
Renfro	12	2	14	0	0
King	9	1	10	0	0
Akins	8	0	8	0	0
Humphrey	8	0	8	0	0
Thomas	5	2	7	0	0
Allen	6	0	6	0	0
Hampton	5	0	5	0	0

INDIVIDUAL LEADERS

RUSHING

NEBRASKA	Att	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Player					
Evans	12	130	4.1	23	3
Frost	18	47	2.6	16	0
Sims	5	32	6.4	18	0
Schuster	6	29	4.8	10	0
Makovicka	2	5	2.5	6	0

TEXAS	Att	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Player					
Holmes	9	120	13.3	61	3
Mitchell	7	16	2.3	6	0
Brown	4	7	1.8	4	0
Williams	8	7	0.9	6	0

PASSING

NEBRASKA	Cmp-Att-Int	Yds	TD
Player			
Frost	15-24-0	155	0

TEXAS	Cmp-Att-Int	Yds	TD
Player			
Brown	19-28-2	353	1
Mitchell	0-1-0	0	0

FIELD GOALS

NEBRASKA	Att	Made	Distance
Player			
Brown	2	2	51, 24

TEXAS	Att	Made	Distance
Player			
Dawson	3	3	49, 30, 47

RECEIVING

NEBRASKA	Rec	Yds	APC	Lng	TD
Player					
Evans	6	42	7.0	22	0
Holbein	3	43	14.3	22	0
Vedral	3	35	11.6	14	0
Wiggins	1	15	15.0	15	0
Cheatham	1	11	11.0	11	0
Schuster	1	9	9.0	9	0

TEXAS	Rec	Yds	APC	Lng	TD
Player					
Adams	6	92	15.3	47	0
Fitzgerald	6	73	12.2	23	0
McGarity	3	96	32.0	66	0
Williams	2	21	10.5	17	0
Lewis	1	61	61.0	61	0
Scott	1	10	10.0	10	0

PUNT RETURNS

NEBRASKA	Att	Yds	Avg	Lng	TD
Player					
Fullman	1	7	7.0	7	0

TEXAS	Att	Yds	Avg	Lng	TD
Player					
Adams	1	6	6.0	6	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

NEBRASKA	Att	Yds	Avg	Lng	TD
Player					
Benning	4	77	19.3	33	0

TEXAS	Att	Yds	Avg	Lng	TD
Player					
Adams	2	37	18.5	24	0

1996 SEASON STATS

(12 GAMES)

RUSHING

Name	G	Att	Yds.	YPG	Tds.
Green, A.	10	155	917	91.7	7
Evans, D.	11	128	776	70.5	14
Benning, D.	11	85	465	42.3	7
Frost, S.	12	126	438	36.5	9
Sims, J.	9	41	288	32.0	3
Shuster, B.	11	46	213	19.4	1
Turman, M.	9	21	122	13.5	3
Makovicka, J.	10	23	119	11.9	0
Perino, J.	6	5	51	12.8	0
Cobb, J.	6	12	43	7.0	1
Christo, M.	4	3	35	8.8	0
Eicher, C.	2	2	18	9.0	0
Kingston, B.	5	9	10	2.5	0
Legate, B.	5	3	8	1.6	0
Olmes, J.	2	3	8	4.0	0
Wiggins, S.	10	2	7	0.7	0
London, F.	3	3	6	3.0	0
Cheatham, K.	8	1	-16	-2.0	0

PASSING

Name	G	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	Tds.
Frost, S.	12	104-200-3	52.0	1,440	13
Turman, M.	9	19-19-0	47.4	126	1
Perino, J.	6	0-2-0	0.0	0	0

RECEIVING

Name	G	No.	Yds.	YPC	TPG	Tds.
Holbein, B.	12	23	335	14.6	27.9	4
Vedral, J.	12	20	300	15.0	25.0	1
Jackson, V.	11	13	220	16.9	20.0	4
Evans, D.	11	12	75	6.3	6.8	0
Green, A.	10	9	93	10.3	9.3	0
Cheatham, K.	8	7	105	15.0	13.1	1
Brown, L.	7	5	101	20.2	14.4	1
Lake, J.	5	4	101	25.3	16.8	1
Shuster, B.	11	4	83	20.8	7.5	0
Jackson, S.	7	4	48	12.0	6.9	2
Wiggins, S.	10	3	45	15.0	4.5	0
Makovicka, J.	10	3	28	3.0	2.8	0
Willis, A.	4	1	19	19.0	6.3	0
Edwards, J.R.	3	1	10	10.0	5.0	0
Legate, B.	5	1	9	9.0	1.8	0
Wieting, S.	3	1	6	6.0	2.0	0
Benning, D.	11	1	-1	-1.0	-0.1	0

FIELD GOALS

Name	G	Att.	Good	Long
Brown, K.	12	19	12	51

DEFENSE

Name	G	UT	AT	TT	Int.	Sacks
Williams, J.	12	36	57	93	3	5
Hesse, J.	12	33	50	83	0	2
Wistrom, G.	12	30	44	74	1	9.5
Peter, J.	12	17	39	56	0	4
Minter, M.	12	16	35	51	5	0
Stokes, E.	12	22	23	45	1	0
Farley, T.	8	15	28	43	0	3
Foreman, J.	12	10	33	43	2	0.5
Tomich, J.	12	16	25	41	0	5
Warfield, E.	12	18	20	38	3	0
Ogord, J.	11	11	22	33	0	1
Rucker, M.	11	16	16	32	0	7
Brown, R.	12	16	12	28	4	0
Booker, M.	11	8	17	25	1	0
McFarlin, O.	12	5	19	24	0	0
Kelsay, C.	11	10	13	23	0	2.5
Shaw, B.	11	10	12	22	0	1.5
Wiltz, J.	11	5	15	20	0	1
Terwilliger, R.	11	5	15	20	0	1
Toline, T.	8	6	9	15	0	0
List, G.	8	10	3	13	1	0
Jackson, J.	7	3	10	13	1	0.5
Johnson, E.	8	2	10	12	0	0
Brown, M.	10	8	4	12	1	0
Saltsman, S.	10	0	12	12	0	0
Fullman, M.	10	8	4	12	0	0
Ortiz, T.	7	3	7	10	0	1
Walther, E.	5	4	4	8	0	0
Peterson, J.	8	4	3	7	0	0
Warren, S.	6	2	4	6	0	0.5
Allen, D.	4	3	2	5	0	2

TEAM STATISTICS

	NU	OPP
Total Offensive Yards	5,069	3,065
Net Rushing Yards	3,503	1,006
Passing Yards	1,566	2,059

Scoring	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	TOT
NU	82	169	167	94	512
Opponents	29	40	20	64	153

1996 NEBRASKA FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

Record (Conference)	— 10-2 (8-1)
Sept. 7	Michigan State W, 55-14
Sept. 21	@ Arizona State L, 19-0
Sept. 28	Colorado State W, 65-9
Oct. 5	@ Kansas State W, 39-3
Oct. 12	Baylor W, 49-0
Oct. 19	@ Texas Tech W, 24-10
Oct. 26	Kansas W, 63-7
Nov. 2	@ Oklahoma W, 73-21
Nov. 9	Missouri W, 51-7
Nov. 16	@ Iowa State W, 49-14
Nov. 29	Colorado W, 17-12
Dec. 7	vs. Texas* L, 37-27
Jan. 1	vs. Virginia Tech\$
* Big 12 Championship — St. Louis, Mo.	
\$ FedEx Orange Bowl — Miami, Fla.	

Osborne's Teams Have Battled Back Before

Will pressure and adversity reveal the Huskers' true character or break them in half?

By MIKE BABCOCK

On the Tuesday before Nebraska's 37-27 loss against Texas in the Big 12 championship game, receivers coach Ron Brown discussed the unique demands placed on athletes.

"A lot of people think adversity and pressure build character," he said.

"And they can. But sometimes those things break people in half."

Brown's words, though spoken on another subject, were appropriate in the aftermath of the shocking loss. The Cornhuskers have had little experience in dealing with such adversity.

Their character was apparent as they answered reporters' questions. Those who were requested showed up and did the best they could to explain the inexplicable. There was no doubt they would try.

"The entire defense . . . we let everybody down today," said junior rush end Grant Wistrom, the Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year according to the conference coaches and the news media. "We're a much bet-

Nebraska's defense couldn't come up with the big plays (it produced early) when they were needed in the fourth quarter.

ter defense. We gave up 37 points. That says it all. We played bad, at a bad time."

Wistrom was right on both counts. Nebraska's defense is much better than it showed against Texas. The Cornhuskers hadn't given up as many as 37 points since the 1991 Citrus Bowl, when Georgia Tech won the United Press International version of the national championship by beating them 45-21. (They also gave up 45 in a loss at Oklahoma in the final regular-season game in 1990.)

Prior to the Texas game, Nebraska had allowed only 10.5 points per game, third-best in the nation. The Cornhuskers ranked fourth nationally in total defense, allowing 232.9 yards per game.

Texas had surpassed that yardage total by halftime, gaining 265 yards.

As for the timing of Nebraska's defensive letdown . . . well, there is no good time to give up 37 points, except, perhaps, when the offense scores at least 38. But that can't be anticipated.

The Cornhusker offense did the best it could, according to junior center Aaron Taylor. But "the (Longhorns') points kept piling up and piling up," he said. "It just didn't turn our way."

With a victory in St. Louis, Nebraska would have earned a trip to the Sugar Bowl, where it would have played top-ranked Florida State, possibly with a national championship on the line.

Now, the Cornhuskers will return to the Orange Bowl, where they'll play Big East co-champion Virginia Tech, a team looking to gain national respect, on Dec. 31. Nebraska was a regular in the Orange Bowl as the Big Eight champion. The game will be familiar. The site, however, will not. The Orange Bowl now is played at Pro Player Stadium, home of the Miami Dolphins and Florida Marlins.

"It'll be interesting to see how they respond in the bowl game," coach Tom Osborne said.

That brings us back to the original premise: whether pressure and adversity will reveal character or break the Cornhuskers in half. Wistrom didn't hesitate in offering his opinion. "The group takes on the characteristics of its leader," he said. "Coach Osborne is one of the most resilient (leaders)."

The team will regain its focus and be prepared for Virginia Tech, said Wistrom. "I don't think it'll be tough at all. We fought hard all year. We're going out with a win this year. I feel



confident.

"I'm sorry it happened. I promise it's not going to happen again."

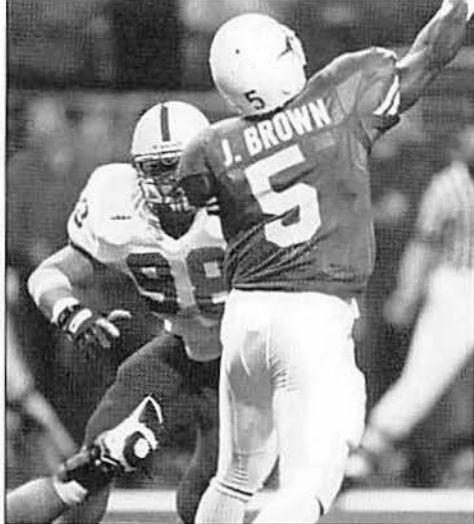
There were no excuses. If anything, individual players accepted too much responsibility. Senior Mike Minter, for example, tried to shoulder the awful burden of the bitter loss.

The 66-yard touchdown pass, from James Brown to Wane McGarity, with which Texas regained the lead at 30-27 with 8:53 remaining in the fourth quarter was his fault, according to Minter. "I just missed the ball. I think that was the turning point in the game," he said. "I've got to live with that."

Minter was being too harsh on himself. He had concentrated on playing weakside linebacker for two weeks, after Terrell Farley was dismissed from the team. On the play in question, Minter had returned to rover back, replacing a shaken-up Eric Warfield, who had been forced to the sideline.

Missing two weeks of practice at rover is significant, Osborne said.

Besides, the game was lost as much in the first quarter as the



Doug DeVoe

Could the NFL be in Grant Wistrom's immediate future?

fourth.

The Cornhuskers have won as a team this season, and against Texas, they lost as a team. Every player could look at himself and find at least one or two things he could have done to make a difference.

Although it might have been a reasonable question anyway, it was predictable under the circumstances. Wistrom was asked if he had given any further thought to submitting his name for the National Football League draft, as if the disappoint-

ment of the loss might influence a decision to leave.

One NFL draft analyst rates Wistrom as a potential fourth pick in the first round. Wistrom has remained non-committal on the subject, however, and the Texas loss didn't change that.

"I don't care about that right now," he said. "I just want to keep playing for Nebraska."

As the reporters began walking away, Wistrom added: "I'm not leaving here without winning."

Cornhusker fans can't take much solace in Wistrom's answer.

Nebraska could win again before the New Year begins. It probably will, in fact.

The Cornhuskers battled back after the 19-0 loss at Arizona State and nearly put themselves in position to play for a third consecutive national championship. "This one hurts," said Osborne.

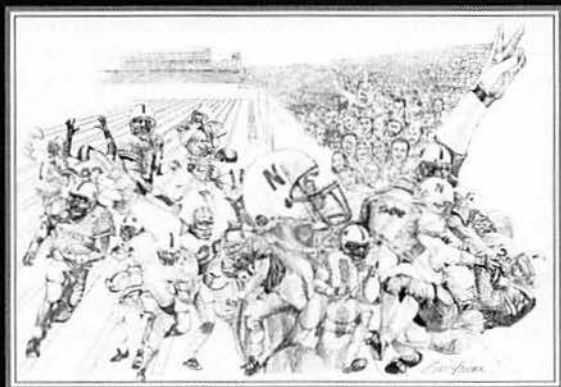
"Obviously, it takes us out of the national championship hunt."

But pride needn't be tied to championships. The Cornhuskers can't win another national title. But with a victory against Virginia Tech, they can still finish among the nation's elite. ■



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Three's A Charm

*Cornhusker recruiting staff hopes it has found
a trio of gems in Kansas teammates*

As Tom Osborne's Nebraska Cornhuskers prepared for their Big-12 championship game against Texas, the Cornhuskers were inching closer and closer to wrapping up their 1997 recruiting season before the holiday season.

The Huskers plan to give roughly 18 scholarships, and with two early commitments in the month of December, the Huskers' total of verbal commitments stood at 12. Many of those 12 are high-profile athletes, even All-Americans, some of whom are ranked first in the nation at their positions.

However, as the Huskers seem to do every year, they also take a player or two who isn't highly-rated by the so-called recruiting gurus, players who don't show up on the *Parade* magazine All-America charts. Once again the Huskers have shocked the recruiting world by earning commitments from a pair of athletes who weren't highly-rated by the recruiting services.

The Cornhuskers have the foresight to look at a lesser-known high school player and see his potential to develop into a big-time player once he puts on the Huskers' red uniform. It's happened more than once, and Nebraska is hoping it happens again to a trio of athletes from Shawnee Mission (Northwest), Kan.

Defensive end/outside linebacker John Paul Wichmann (6-foot-4, 210 pounds, 4.6 in the 40-yard dash), defensive back Ben Cornelsen (6-0, 175, 4.5) and free safety Grant Bunton (6-0, 200, 4.5) all played in virtual anonymity this season. Even the *Kansas City Star* failed to say much about the three, despite a team record of 7-2.

Realizing not much was being said about his talented trio, Northwest head coach Scott Diebold sent out a highlight film to selected major colleges in his area, and it was at that point, Diebold said, that the Huskers became very interested.

"I sent a highlight tape that I had

put together to (NU defensive coordinator Charlie) McBride, and he acted on it very quickly," Diebold said. "After looking at the tape, he came down to our school to look at more game footage, and liked what he saw so much that he took the footage back to show Coach Osborne. Coach Osborne then liked what he saw so much, that he didn't drag his feet. He called to offer Wichmann and Cornelsen full rides, and Bunton a full academic scholarship."

Only Bunton is listed among a few of the recruiting services, despite the fact that all three are putting together impressive senior



By
**JAMES
HALE**

seasons.

Wichmann is one of the nation's top decathletes, finishing fifth in the nation as a sophomore. As a rush end/outside linebacker this season, Wichmann made 59 solo stops and 47 assisted tackles, and came up with two fumble recoveries.

Cornelsen rushed for 597 yards, added another 200 receiving, had 400 yards in returns, and scored three touchdowns as a running back. On defense he managed 52 tackles (including 26 solo) with one interception.

Bunton was the team's leading tackler at free safety with 73 solo stops, 81 assisted tackles and one fumble recovery.

Because of their dominant play and excellent athletic ability, Diebold said he was not surprised at all at Nebraska's offer, despite the lack of media attention given to the three players.

"It doesn't surprise me at all," Diebold said. "I knew all three would be Division I football players. I have seen a lot of great athletes go through here, and these three are the very best athletes since I've been here. (Cornelsen) has been a great running back for us, but will probably play in the secondary at Nebraska. (Wichmann) reminds me



of a Grant Wistrom-type, a pass-rushing end that can really run, while (Buntun) is hard to project, because he plays free safety for us, but will probably put on about 30 pounds at Nebraska and play outside linebacker.

Buntun's academic scholarship doesn't count against the Huskers' allowable total, leaving around six to eight to give, before the Huskers' first visitation date (Dec. 13).

Athlete **Irwin Swinney** (6-0, 180, 4.5) of Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.; quarterback **Eric Crouch** (6-0, 185, 4.5) of Omaha (Millard North); offensive lineman **Kyle Kollmorgen** (6-4, 267, 5.2) of Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.; offensive lineman **David Volke** (6-5, 260, 4.9) of Battle Creek, Neb.; **Steve Alstadt** (6-5, 255, 5.2) of Ft. Calhoun, Neb., and wide receiver **Matt Davison** (6-1, 175, 4.6) of Tecumseh, Neb., are early commitments that still are holding firm.

Quarterback **Bobby Newcombe** (6-0, 185, 4.5) of Albuquerque (Highland), N.M.; linebackers **Kyle Vanden Bosch** (6-3, 235, 4.55); **Jamie Burrows** (6-3, 230, 4.8) of Ames, Iowa, and **Mark Vedral** (6-1, 200, 4.7) of Gregory, S.D., also are holding firm.

Swinney, Crouch, Newcombe and Vanden Bosch were preseason All-America selections, with Crouch and Vanden Bosch rated as the best at their respective positions.

All the rest, outside of the three Kansas athletes, were rated at least as All-Region performers.

The Huskers have a great shot at closing out their recruiting class with commitments from some of the top prep prospects in the country.

Among those committing to visit Lincoln are defensive end **Evan Perroni** (6-5, 250, 4.77) of Houston (Clear Lake), Texas, who visited Notre Dame (Dec. 6) and Nebraska (Dec. 14). He will go to Texas A&M (Jan. 10) and is deciding on Ohio State and Colorado.

Also considering a collegiate career in Lincoln is linebacker **Thomas Fortune** (6-3, 210, 4.7) of Colorado Springs (Harrison), Colo., who made 95 tackles and came up with 22 sacks while catching 45 passes for 560 yards and 14 touchdowns as a tight end. Fortune visited Northwestern (Dec. 10) and will travel to Nebraska (Jan. 17) and Notre Dame (Jan. 24). Tight end/linebacker **Tracy Wistrom** (6-5, 200, 4.7) of Webb City, Mo., is the younger brother of NU rush end Grant Wistrom, and has visited

Nebraska (Dec. 14). He also took his 95 tackles to Northwestern (Dec. 7) and Kansas State (Dec. 21). Texas, Missouri, Iowa State and Alabama are vying for the final two official visits.

The Huskers, with the priority on defensive backs, have a visit set with **Abdul Howard** (6-1, 190, 4.4) of Quincy (Shanks), Fla., one of the finest athletes in the country.

While playing quarterback, Howard completed 15-of-31 passes for 343 yards and two touchdowns. As a wide receiver, he caught 36 passes for 787 yards and eight touchdowns. And as a running back,

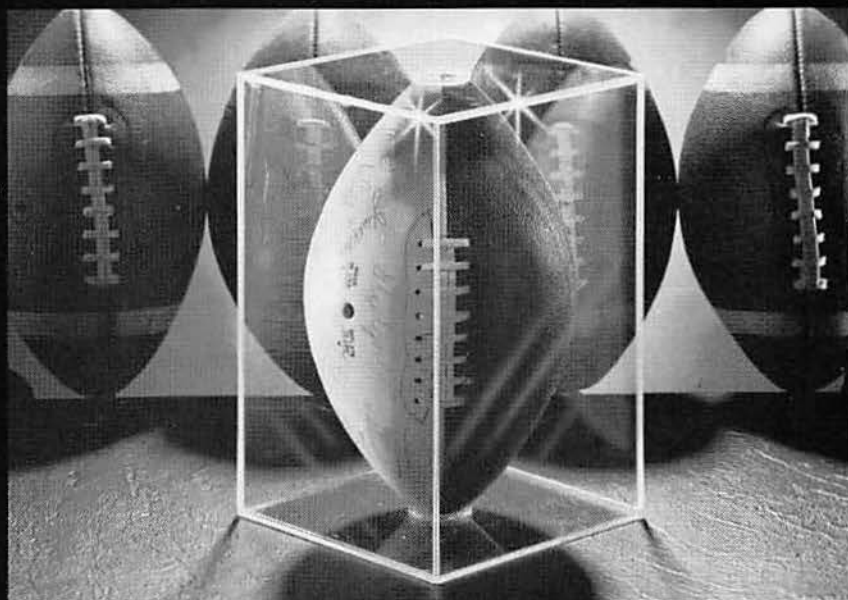
Howard rushed for 547 yards on 34 carries and scored nine times.

Not one to stay limited to one side of the ball, as a cornerback Howard picked off six passes and managed 82 tackles and four fumble recoveries.

All-American defensive end **Darryl "Rocky" Bright** (6-3, 240, 4.6) of Tulsa (Washington), Okla., has set visited UCLA, Oklahoma (Dec. 6) and Notre Dame (Dec. 13). He visits Nebraska (Jan. 17).

Offensive lineman **Lynn Larabee** (6-3, 245, 5.0) of Oklahoma City (Western Heights), Okla., visited Nebraska (Dec. 13). ■

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Terry Pettit expected volleyball competition in the new Big 12 to be difficult. He might have underestimated the degree of difficulty, in fact. It definitely was a grind, he said at a news conference prior to the Huskers' opening match in the NCAA regional, adding: "That and more."

"Even after you win, you feel like you're been in a prizefight," Pettit

said.

Nebraska's regular-season-ending road trip to Texas illustrates Pettit's point. The Huskers finished up with a match against Texas at Austin on the day after Thanksgiving, then traveled to College Station for a match against Texas A&M on the day after that. Oh yes, they won both matches.

Grind? How about this? "You go down (to Texas) on Thanksgiving Day, practice on Thanksgiving, get up the next morning, practice on Friday and play Texas in front of 6,000 people," said Pettit.

Nebraska wrapped up the Big 12 championship with a 3-1 victory against the Longhorns, who were ranked eighth nationally at the time. "Then you get on the bus — it's foggy — and take what's normally an hour and 20 minute trip. It takes three hours, driving in 30-miles-an-hour fog. You step out (of the bus) and walk into an arena with 50-year-olds who have their faces painted," said Pettit.

The crowd was "very enthusiastic." A&M hadn't lost a home match until Nebraska's visit. The Aggies went down to defeat in three: 15-3, 15-13, 15-7. It was their first sweep at home since 1992.

Some things were different this season. Some weren't. Despite the obvious demands of the Big 12 schedule, Nebraska lost only once in 20 conference matches. Texas Tech, which was ranked 20th, needed five games to defeat the Huskers at

**SIDE
OUT**

Nebraska's stretch run to the Big 12 title was led by seniors including Kate Crnich.



Jon Waller

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Lubbock in late October. Nebraska recovered, however, to win 10 consecutive conference matches and finish the regular season at 27-3.

After the Tech loss, Pettit was asked if he thought the defending national champion Huskers could be hosts to an NCAA regional. "I said yes, if we won out," he said. "There were 10 matches left ... matches on the road with Kansas State, Texas and Texas A&M. So I couldn't have predicted that."

Nebraska was the No. 1 seed in the East Region and the No. 4 seed overall, which meant it earned a first-round bye. Five others from the Big 12 made the 48-team field: Texas, Texas Tech, Texas A&M, Colorado and Kansas State, which advanced to the NCAA Tournament for the first time.

Nebraska, by comparison, made the tournament for the 15th consecutive time.

The Big 12 was strong enough to put six of its 11 teams in the NCAA Tournament. But that didn't prevent the young Huskers from winning a 19th conference title in Pettit's 20 seasons as coach. They lost only nine games in 20 conference matches, in fact, and three of those were at Texas Tech.

After the championship-clinching victory at Texas, Longhorns coach Mick Haley was quoted by an Austin newspaper as saying: "I think we're as good as Nebraska. The difference is mental."

Texas A&M coach Laurie Corbelli offered a similar analysis following Nebraska's sweep of her team. The Huskers didn't lose their poise in Austin or College Station. "I hoped that would happen. I don't know whether I could have predicted it, but it was very important in both of those matches," Pettit said. "Hopefully, they (his players) will learn from that and realize that (mental toughness) may be the most important thing in sports ... if you're somewhat equal (in ability) to your opponent."

Nebraska also benefited significantly from being the defending national champion. "I don't think we'd be where we are right now if we hadn't had that kind of season," said Pettit.

"That affects us, and it affects our opponents. I don't think our opponents look at our roster and say: 'There are three freshmen and a couple of sophomores. What they're saying is: 'This is Nebraska. They're national champions.' It helps them

(opponents) prepare for us, but ultimately, in some situations, it helps us. Our players, to their credit, have talked about the same goals they had last year."

Nebraska's stretch run was led by seniors Kate Crnich and Maria Hedbeck and junior Lisa Reitsma, who was particularly dominant in the match at Texas. "The thing that seems to have happened, that I didn't know would happen, was the older players just raised their game and everybody went with them. They've been there before," Pettit said. "The younger players, particularly our freshmen ... the challenge they faced is, usually their season is over by now and they're already (playing) basketball."

The NCAA Tournament competition still lay ahead. But even if the Huskers weren't able to repeat as national champions, they would have exceeded most expectations, except their own.

The young players, like the veterans, have learned "what we play for," said Pettit. "We play to try and

Nebraska made up for its lone conference loss (to Texas Tech on the road), by beating the Red Raiders in Lincoln.

win conference championships and we play for the NCAA Tournament."

Those goals are closely aligned. If a team can achieve the first goal, it will be able to compete at the national level. Playing in the Big 12 "is a grind. But I also believe it now puts us in a position with the Pac-10 and

Big Ten. They've been doing this. I think it makes you better. If we hadn't had this conference season, I don't know if we would have had that poise at Texas and Texas A&M," Pettit said.

The Big 12 has had a positive effect on Pettit's program. "I think it moves us along," he said. ■



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INNER STRENGTH

Transferring from a successful program at Virginia to the newly founded one at Nebraska took guts. Those same guts helped Becky Hornbacher lead NU to a miracle season

The Nebraska soccer team's dream season came to an end in Portland, Ore. With a victory there, coach John Walker's surprising Huskers would have advanced to the NCAA Final Four.

They lost, however, to 1995 NCAA runner-up Portland 1-0, on a goal in the 57th minute. It was Nebraska's only loss in 24 matches, in the program's third season. Remarkable.

Even if the Huskers hadn't been so successful, goalkeeper Becky Hornbacher would have been happy with her decision to transfer from Virginia two years ago. The success helped to alleviate her frustration over having to sit out an entire year because Virginia wouldn't give her a release.

"I was so ready for this season," Hornbacher said.

Hornbacher is from Ralston, Neb., where she was a multi-sport high

school athlete. Her father, Bill, was a defensive lineman for Bob Devaney's football teams in the late 1960s, coming from Rogers City, Mich., to earn letters in 1968 and 1969. He holds the Cornhusker career record for blocked kicks by a lineman (six). Apparently, Becky comes by her ability to deflect soccer balls naturally.

She attracted recruiting attention not only for soccer but also for basketball and volleyball. Soccer held the most appeal for her, however, in part because she began playing the sport at age 5.

"I was always involved in athletics, and other things, too. I took ballet lessons when I was younger," she said. "But I played soccer all along ... there are just so many facets to the game."

Hornbacher played goalkeeper even then. One day during a practice, she made a dive to block a shot. That's when her youth league coach decided to put her in goal, a respon-

sibility that could become boring for an energetic youngster. "I played half field and half goalkeeper," she said. "I was a pretty hyper kid. I was always kicking the poles, kicking dirt and even sitting on the ground, sometimes."

Her appreciation for the subtleties of goalkeeping increased as she grew older. "I can't really tell you what attracted me to it," she said. But after she attended a camp for goalkeepers conducted by Tony DiCicco, coach of the national women's team, she didn't want to play anywhere else.

"I liked the position before, but I was much more serious about it after that," she said.

Hornbacher went to the camp in Deerfield, Ill., the summer before her junior year in high school. For a week, she was up at 7:30 a.m. for a day of meetings and practice that continued until the late afternoon. "It was very demanding physically,"

Hornbacher was a dominate force in the net for the Huskers and earned All-Big 12 honors for her efforts.

**ALL
SPORTS**

she said. "I had never been to a camp like that in my life."

She earned four letters in soccer at Ralston High School and was a three-time first-team all-state selection. She was a first-team Nebraska Soccer Coaches Association honoree as a junior and senior. And she also was chosen as Ralston High's Athlete of the Year when she was a senior.

Nebraska didn't have a women's varsity soccer team at the time. Hornbacher made recruiting visits to Virginia and Colorado College before settling on the former. She was well-prepared to compete at the major college level. "I was ready to take the step from high school to college," she said.

She started two games for Virginia as a freshman before suffering a broken leg, which sidelined her for the remainder of the season. She was able to save the eligibility with a medical redshirt, however. She led the Atlantic Coast Conference in shutouts and goals-against-average as a sophomore. Life was good at Virginia. But Nebraska had established a women's soccer program, and she wanted to go home.

Her interest in the Huskers began

with a telephone call from a friend who had been a teammate in the Gladiators youth program in Omaha. The friend told her about Nebraska's new program and encouraged her to go to North Carolina to watch the Huskers, who were playing in a tournament there. At first, "I thought it would be neat to play there. But it wasn't really an option," Hornbacher said.

In order to contact Walker, Hornbacher had to get a release signed by her coach at Virginia.

The Virginia coach began meeting with Hornbacher, trying to persuade her to remain in Charlottesville. "Coach made me go to a sports psychologist. I talked to her on a daily basis," said Hornbacher. "I told her (the coach) I was looking at my options. I told her I didn't know what I was going to do. I felt like playing basketball, too, and she told me I could play both sports. She told me she would let me walk on in basketball because I already had my soccer scholarship."

She promised Hornbacher would be the player featured on Virginia's 1995 soccer poster, but to no avail. "She didn't think I would go," said Hornbacher, whose resolve couldn't

be shaken.

With a signed release, she could have played right away. Hornbacher refused to back down.

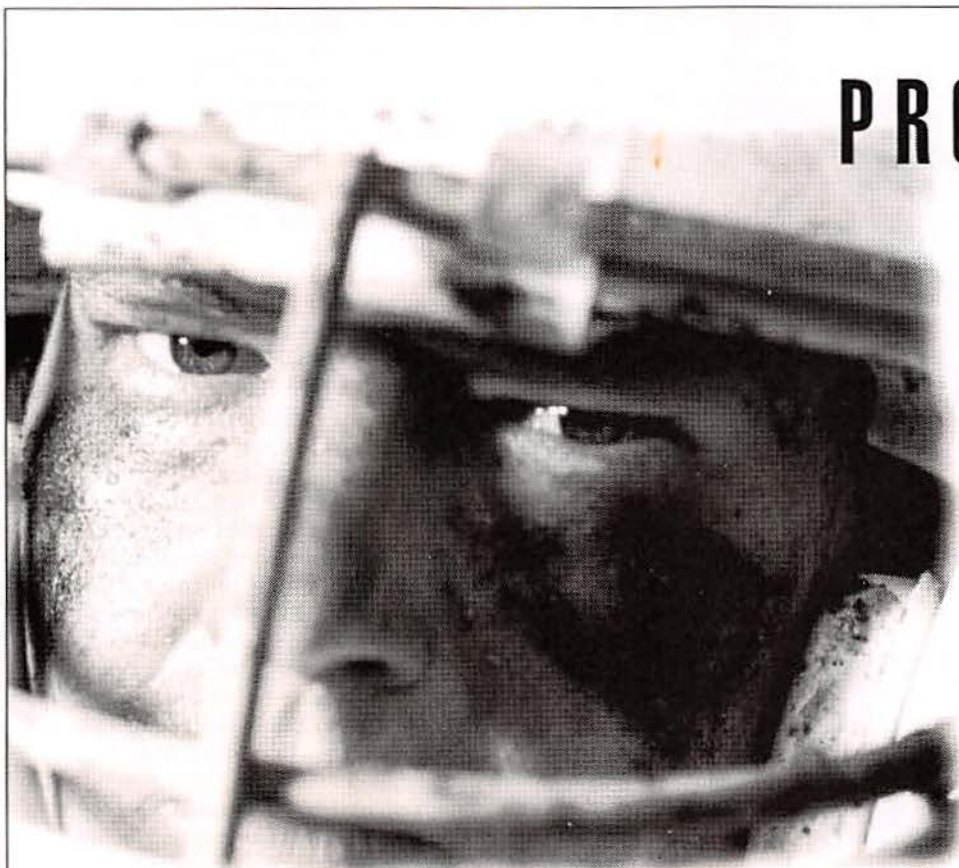
Hornbacher went through the appeal process, without success. If she transferred to Nebraska, she would have to sit out her first season. She decided she was willing to do that. What she didn't know at the time was, she couldn't play in the spring exhibition season that first year, either.

Sitting out a full year "was extremely difficult for me. I wanted to be a part of it so bad. I don't know if I was depressed, exactly. But I didn't take it very well," said Hornbacher.

This season was worth the wait, however. The support the Huskers enjoyed was exactly how Hornbacher's friend had told her it would be. Nebraska's first two NCAA tournament matches at the Abbott Sports Complex drew crowds of more than 1,000, despite less-than-ideal weather.

"It's amazing your team can be supported like that," she said.

And with only one senior on this season's team, it should be even better in 1997. ■



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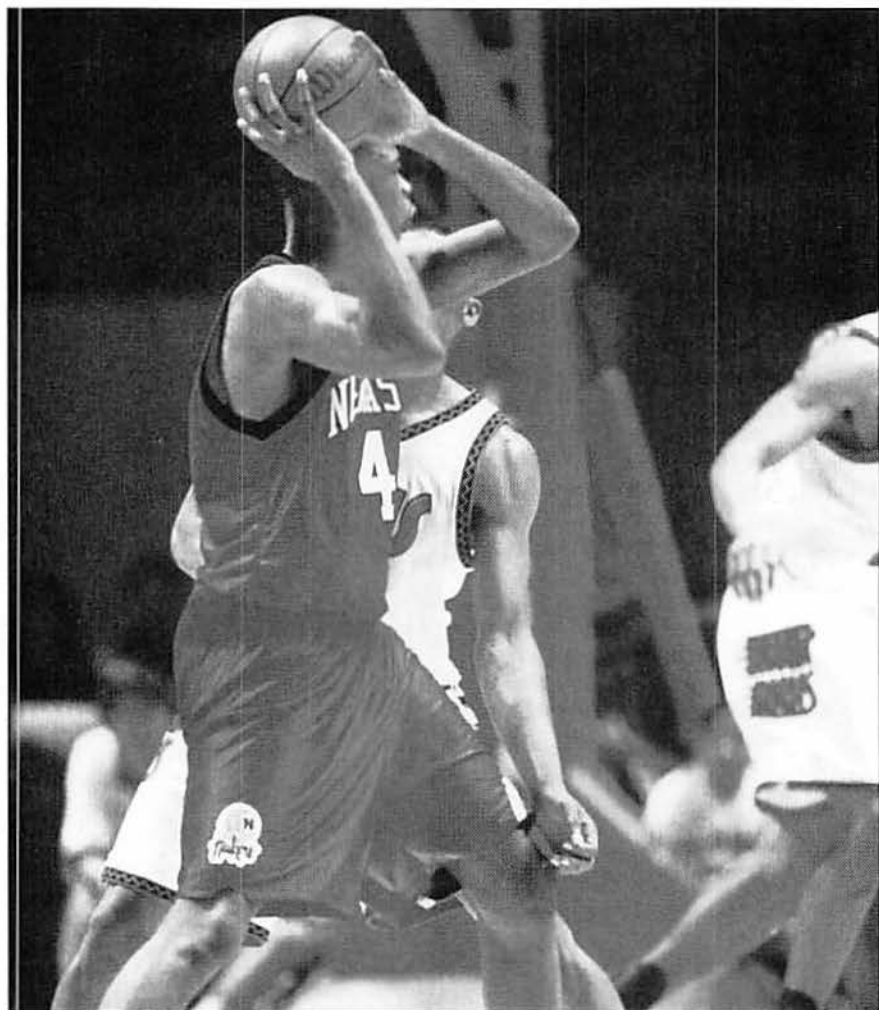
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A Knack For The Boards

If the beginning of the 1996-97 season is any indicator, Venson Hamilton could finish his career as one of the school's best all-time rebounders



Corby D. Roberts

strength, is rebounding," Coach Danny Nee said following Hamilton's 15-rebound performance in the final preseason exhibition game against Marathon Oil.

"He's had a knack since the day he got here. He's the best rebounder on the team. There's no question about that. What he did the other night (the 15 rebounds), I think personally, he should be doing on a regular basis because he absolutely plays above the rim. And he's as strong as a bull."

What the 6-foot-9, 240-pound Hamilton isn't, or at least wasn't as a freshman, is focused in practice. "There's a lot of guys who look great in practice and then at game time they disappear," said Nee. "Venson is a game-time player. He's not what I call a practice player. He drives the assistant coaches nuts because when it comes scrimmage time, he's there. But during the drills and everything, he's not."

"We have to get him to be a better practice player. It's all fundamentals."

Hamilton's fundamental problems affected his shooting, which, in turn, also slowed his progress during the preseason, prompting Nee to remark: "What he's lost in a year is his offensive ability of when to shoot the ball and when to pass it. He's developed this terrible habit of doing everything with one hand."

"If you watch him really close, he does everything one-handed. He has to get two hands on the ball. And he's being a little bit too unselfish. He's passing the ball when he should shoot it, and he's shooting, maybe, when he should pass it, especially in the lane. I want him to just catch and shoot, without dribbling."

To encourage Hamilton to catch the ball with two hands, Nee had assistant coach Jimmy Williams pass him an 8-pound medicine ball during practice. "You'd break your

Leroy Chalk. Dave Hoppen. Rich King. Andre Smith. Chuck Jura. Those are the top five career rebounders in modern (post-1952) Nebraska basketball history, listed in order.

Venson Hamilton could join that elite group before he completes his Cornhusker career. He has a long way to go, of course. But he's only a sophomore, and he's gotten off to a good start,

considering he has yet to become a starter. Last season, he pulled down 161 rebounds, playing just under 15 minutes a game. This season, he has had a more active role, and his rebound numbers have reflected it.

In an 83-81 overtime loss at Texas in the opener, he pulled down 11 rebounds in 25 minutes. In the second game, he grabbed nine in 18 minutes. In the fourth game, he had 11 in 16 minutes.

"Venson Hamilton's forte, or

HOOPS

hand catching it with one hand," said Nee. "If you throw it at his head, he's going to have a sore head. He's kissed it a few times."

Hamilton shot 54.6 percent from the field last season, including 56.6 percent in conference play, an indication that he was making good offensive decisions more often than not. He was 9-for-9 from the field in a 75-65 loss against Iowa State at the Devaney Sports Center, tying a school record for consecutive field goals without a miss on the way to scoring a personal-high 19 points.

He shares the consecutive field goal record with Jura (1970) and Hoppen (1985).

Hamilton shot a better percentage from the field than he did from the free throw line as a freshman. His free throw problems might have been a matter of concentration as much as anything, however. He made 5-of-6 in the 90-78 victory against St. Joseph's in the NIT semifinals. And early this

season, he hit two free throws for the final points in a surprisingly close 79-76 victory against Texas-San Antonio at the Sports Center. He also grabbed two key rebounds in the game's final six seconds.

Chris Foyt



Playing in just under 15 minutes a game last year, Hamilton pulled down 161 rebounds.

move to fourth on the Cornhusker career list (behind only King, teammate Mikki Moore and Derrick Chandler) just by reaching last season's total. He's already in Nebraska's career top 10.

He complements Moore, who began the season just 35 blocked shots behind King.

Hamilton was recruited by Nebraska from tradition-rich Oak

Hill Academy in Virginia, where he was a teammate of Kentucky's Ron Mercer. He averaged 12 points and 10 rebounds on a 33-3 team. The 10-rebounds-per-game average was the second-highest in school history.

Before enrolling at Oak Hill, Hamilton played three seasons at East Rutherford High School in Forest City, N.C., earning all-conference and all-state honors in each of those seasons.

Hamilton got off to a slow start in preseason practice. In early November, Nee said he wasn't "quite where we'd like him to be. He's just not doing as well as we thought he should do. But he's working at it, and I think he'll come along fine in time. He's just not making the shots he has to make."

A month later, it appeared that Hamilton had broken out of the slump. In the first four games, he came off the bench to grab 37 rebounds, almost one-fourth of last season's total. Such a pace, if he could maintain it throughout the season, would rank with the best in Cornhusker history.

He probably won't do that, coming off the bench. But you get the idea. The guy can rebound. ■

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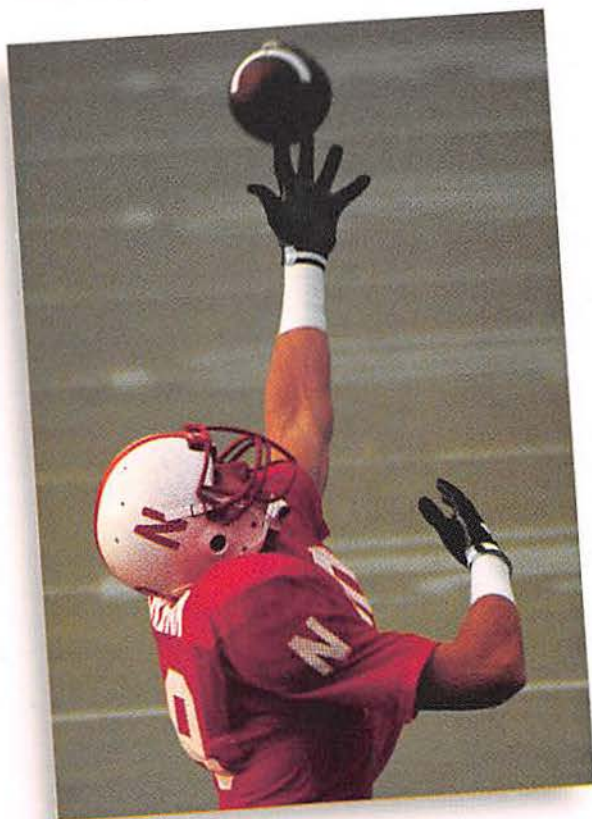


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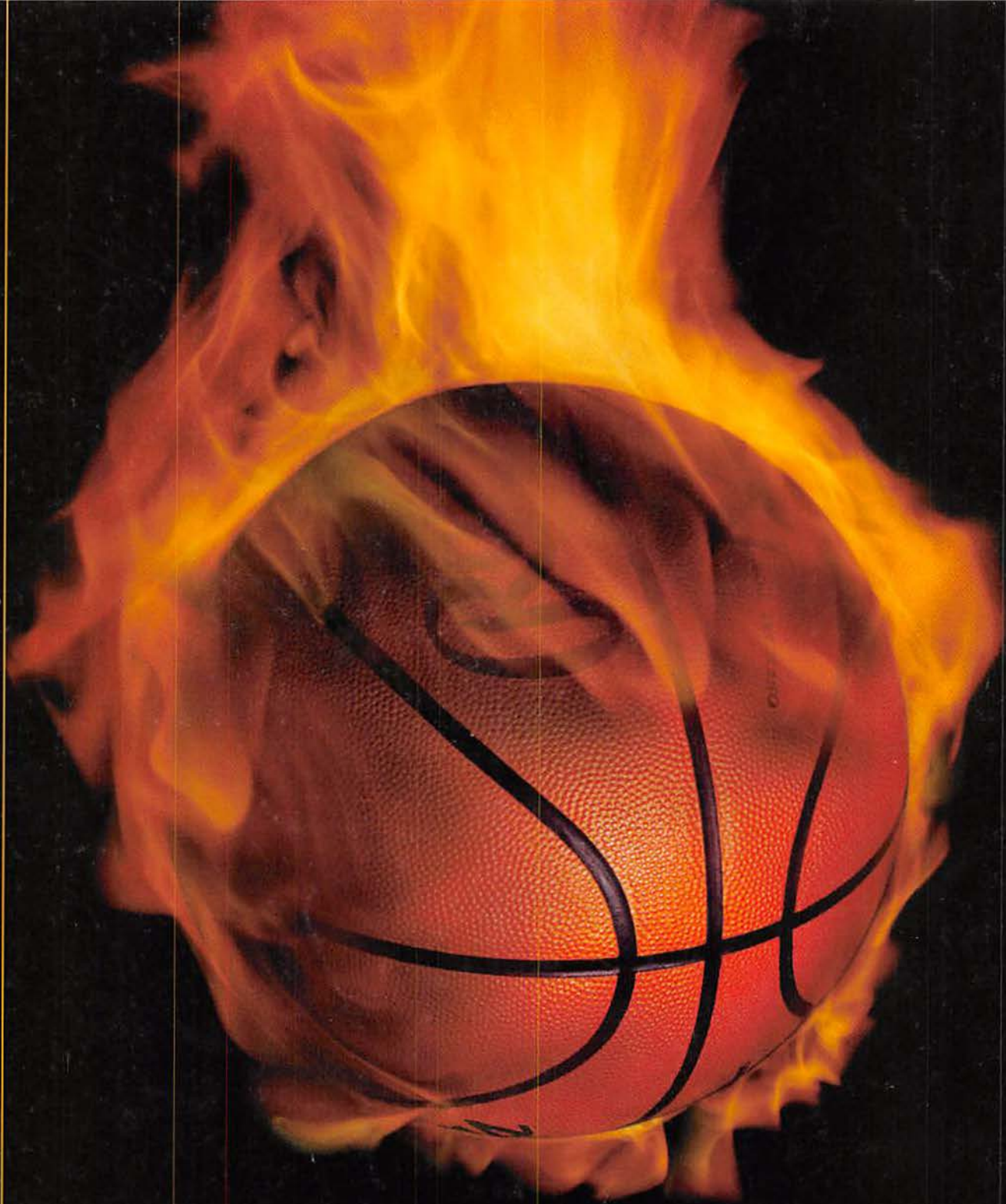
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